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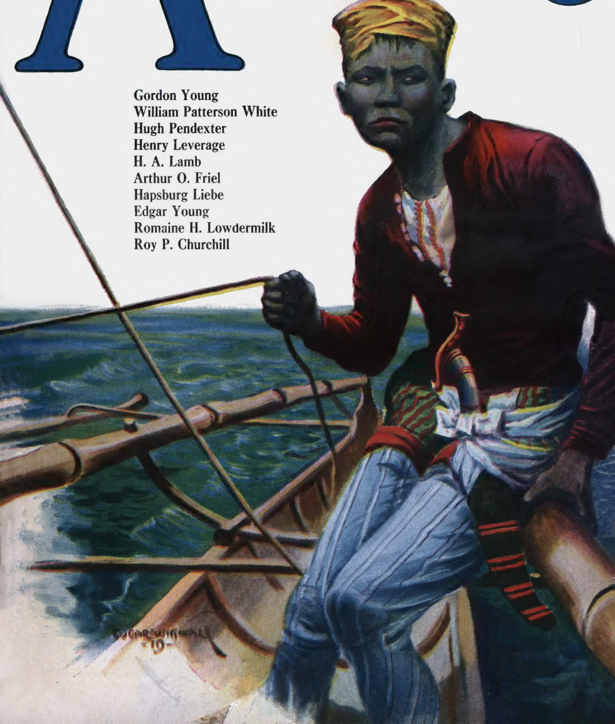

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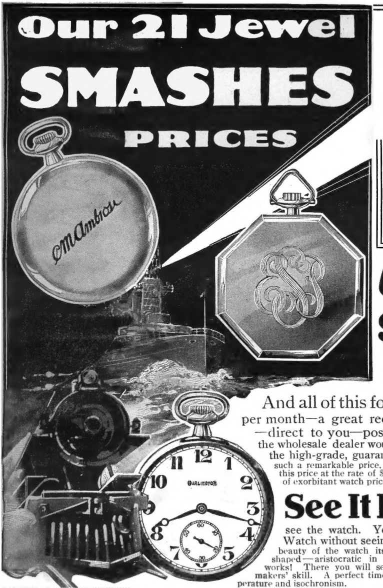

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ADVENTURE
Dec. 3rd, 1919

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Vol. 23 No. 5
Serial No. 143

Campbell Studios

Miss Evelyn Gosnell
in "Up in Mabel's Room"

Wallace Reid
Star in "The Valley of the Giants"
A Paramount-Artcraft Picture

Are You a Blond?

The Secret of Making People Like You

THE greatest asset any man can possibly have is the faculty for making people like him. It is even more important than ability.

The secret of making people like you lies in your ability to understand the emotional and mental characteristics of the people you meet.

Did you know that a blond has an entirely different temperament than a brunet?—that to get along with a blond type you must act entirely different than you would to get along with a brunet?

When you really know the difference between blonds and brunets, the difference in their characters, temperaments, abilities and peculiar traits you will save yourself many a mistake—and you will incidentally learn much you never knew before about yourself.

* * * * *

PAUL GRAHAM was a blond, and not until he learned that there was all the difference in the world between the characteristics of a blond and those of a brunet did he discover the secret of making people like him.

Paul had been keeping books for years for a large corporation which had branches all over the country It was generally thought by his associates that he would never rise above that job. He had a tremendous ability with figures—could wind them around his little finger—but he did not have the ability to mix with big men; did not know how to make people like him.

Then one day the impossible happened. Paul Graham became popular.

Business men of importance who had formerly given him only a passing nod of acquaintance suddenly showed a desire for his friendship. People—even strangers—actually went out of their way to do things for him. Even he was astounded at his new power over men and women. Not only could he get them to do what he wanted them to do, but the actually anticipated his wishes and seemed eager to please him.

From the day the change took place he began to go up in business. Now he is the Head Auditor for his corporation at an immense increase in salary And all this came to him simply because he learned the secret of making people like him.

You, too, can have the power of making people like you. For by the same method used by Paul Graham, you can, at a glance, tell the characteristic of any man, woman or child—tell instantly the likes and dislikes, and YOU CAN MAKE PEOPLE LIKE YOU. Here is how it is done:

Everyone you know can be placed in one of two general types—blond or brunet. There is as big a difference between the mental and emotional characteristics of a blond and those of a brunet as there is between night and day. You persuade a blond in one way—a brunet in another. Blonds enjoy one phase of life—brunets another. Blonds make good n one kind of a job—brunets in one entirely ifferent.

To know these differences scientifically is the first tep in judging men and women; in getting on well with them; in mastering their minds; in making hem like you; in winning their respect, admiration, ove and friendship.

And when you have learned these differences—when you can tell at a glance just what to do and ay to make any man or woman like you, your uccess in life is assured.

For example, there's the case of a large manuacturing concern. Trouble sprang up at one of the actories. The men talked strike. Things looked ugly. Harry Winslow was sent to straighten it out. On the eve of a general walk-out he pacified the men and headed off the strike. And not only this, but ever since then, that factory has led all the others for production. He was able to do this, because he knew how to make these men like him and do what he wanted them to do.

Another case, entirely different, is that of Henry Peters. Because of his ability to make people like him—his faculty for "getting under the skin" and making people think his way, he was given the position of Assistant to the President of a large firm. Two other men, both well liked by their fellow employees, had each expected to get the job. So when the outside man, Peters, came in, he was looked upon by everyone as an interloper and was openly disliked by every other person in the office.

Peters was handicapped in every way. But in spite of that, in three weeks he had made fast friends of everyone in the house and had even won over the two men who had been most bitter against him. The whole secret is that he could tell in an instant how to appeal to any man and make himself well liked.

A certain woman who had this ability moved with her family to another town. As is often the case, it is a very difficult thing for any woman to break into the chill circle of society in this town, if she was not known. But her ability to make people like her soon won for her the close friendship of many of the "best families" in the town. Some people wonder how she did it. It was simply the secret at work—the secret of judging people's character and making them like you.

* * * * *

YOU realize, of course, that just knowing the difference between a blond and a brunet could not accomplish all these wonderful things. There are other things to be taken into account. But here is the whole secret.

You know that everyone does not think alike. What one likes another dislikes. And what offends one pleases another. Well, there is your cue.. You can make an instant "hit" with anyone, if you say the things they want you to say, and act the way they want you to act. Do this and they will surely like you and believe in you and will go miles out of their way to PLEASE YOU.

You can do this easily by knowing certain simple signs. In addition to the difference in complexion, every man, woman and child has written on them signs as distinct as though they were in letters a foot high, which show you from one quick glance exactly what to say and to do to please them—to get them to believe—to think as you think—to do exactly what you want them to do.

In knowing these simple signs is the whole secret of getting what you want out of life—of making friends, of business and social advantage. Every great leader uses this method. That is why he IS a leader. Use it yourself and you will quickly become a leader—nothing can stop you.

You have heard of Dr. Blackford, the Master Character Analyst. Many concerns will not employ a man without first getting Dr. Blackford to pass on him. Concerns such as Westinghouse Electric and Manufacturing Company, Baker-Vawter Company, Scott Paper Company and many others pay Dr. Blackford large annual fees for advice on human nature.

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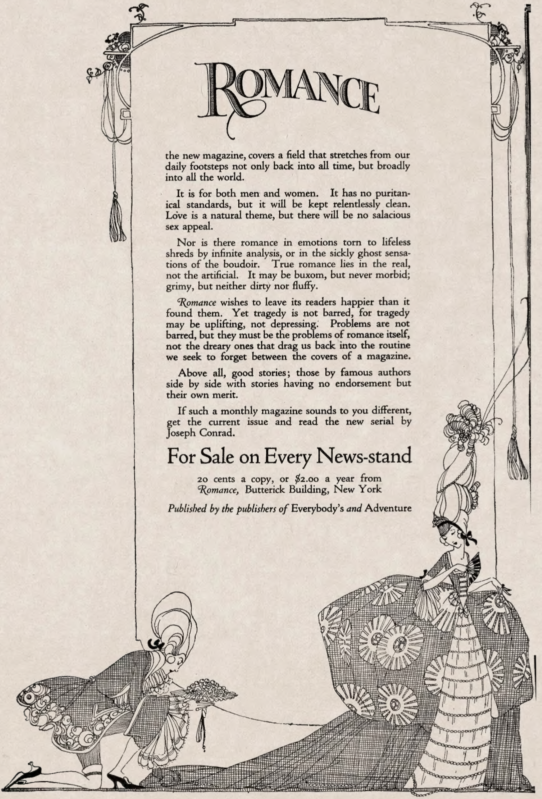

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the new magazine, covers a field that stretches from our daily footsteps not only back into all time, but broadly into all the world.

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Romance wishes to leave its readers happier than it found them. Yet tragedy is not barred, for tragedy may be uplifting, not depressing. Problems are not barred, but they must be the problems of romance itself, not the dreary ones that drag us back into the routine we seek to forget between the covers of a magazine.

Above all, good stories; those by famous authors side by side with stories having no endorsement but their own merit.

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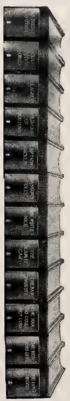

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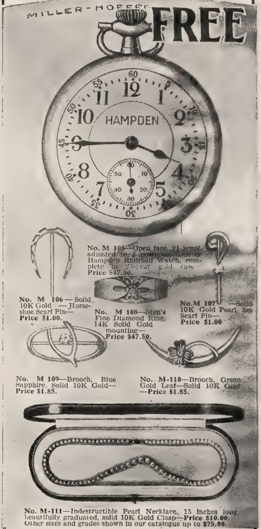

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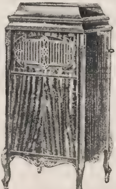

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"*STEVE PACKARD*, you—you're a —— fool!"

Such are "Hell-Fire" Packard's words of welcome to his grandson who has been wandering about the world for twelve years. Yet *Steve* is not discouraged even when the old man tells the amount of money *Steve* must make to win back his father's ranch, for *Steve* has something of the spirit that earned the name Hell-Fire for his grandfather. "Man to Man," a four-part story, by Jackson Gregory, beginning in the next *Adventure*.

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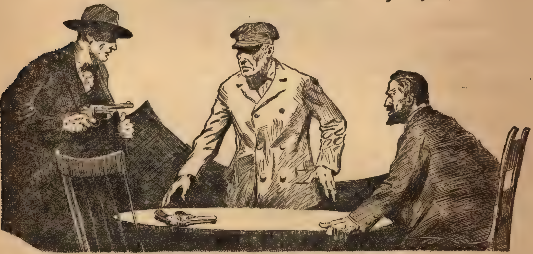

BORN TO BE HANGED, BUT—

By Gordon Young

Author of "Dangerous Men," "Gaboreau the Terrible," etc.

I

I HAD been arrested on the eve of a State election, revolver in hand, a chamber empty, by the body of James H. Thrope, millionaire lumberman and candidate for governor.

I, Don Everhard, was tried, convicted and sentenced to death; which, in California, meant to be hanged.

From the day of my arrest until this, I spoke no word of defense, I offered no explanation and I made no statements.

The time has come when I may tell my story. Here it is:

II

JAMES THROPE was one of the men—and there are many of his kind—that I instinctively hated. And by hate I mean Hate. There are, I believe, certain tenets in theosophy which account for instinctive hatreds as old enmities carried down from a former incarnation. But I know nothing of theosophy beyond that, and I have always found, ultimately, sufficient reasons for hating such men without putting the responsibility on some vague life that I may never have lived in ages past.

Thrope was the sort of man that, had he been a Democrat, I would at once have declared myself a Republican. Had he been a Republican, I would have been a Democrat. I mention this because he was a powerful politician and a candidate, at the time this story ends, for governor. He was a man of powerful body, dominant personality, robust and more vigorous at sixty-five than most men in the earlier years of manhood. I believe that he was generally considered handsome. His face was covered with a short, neatly trimmed black beard.

He had married rather late in years and

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had continued to be a debauchee. But it was not merely wild roisterings that blackened his name; he was a ruthless, unscrupulous, bold fellow with no regard for laws, morals or solemn oaths. His friends said that he never broke a promise; but his friends, like himself, lied.

I may speak this way of the dead man, for I am saying less than I have said with his face turned toward me.

As a politician, I have no doubt that he faithfully gave the promised jobs and graft to those who served his party when it was in office. As a big business man, I suppose that he did discriminate in cheating his associates. Beyond that he may not be praised in my presence without evoking a flat contradiction, and I am likely to speak shortly and use short words when his name is mentioned.

Yet he was known as a "good fellow." His friends were legion. He spent money like water and he gathered it like a pirate.

I was rather young in those days. Because I had less discretion than has since been protectively acquired out of many troubles, I did some things that none but a young, high-tempered fellow would do. I was rather proud of having a reputation as "a dangerous man"; and yet, in all seriousness, if I now encountered such a fellow as I was then, I would very much want to spank him.

I admit it would be risky, for I was then almost as good a shot as I am now; I was then, as now, almost physiologically incapable of being nervous or feeling fear.

The really brave man is like Marshal Ney, whom Napoleon called "the bravest of the brave." A battle was breaking, and Ney, it is said, stood waiting the order to charge. He happened to glance down and saw that his knees were trembling. "Shake, —— you, shake," he muttered, "and if you knew where I am going to take you before this day is over, you would shake worse than that!"

That is courage. My knees never tremble. They never did, no matter what the circumstances. I seem to have been born with something essentially human left out of me; and I mention this at some length to explain how it happened that a very young man, like myself at that time, had a certain prestige among gamblers and crooks who acknowledged no equals but men whom they had cause to admire or to fear.

Too, I may say that I was a born gambler, and what immobility my face may have lacked I painstakingly acquired. The inscrutable face is as essential to a successful gambler as sensitive fingers; there are not, and there never were, honest gamblers who lived by luck alone.

What the nimblest magician may do with cards on the stage, I could do with the deck at the poker-table—and perhaps some other things too. That was not a natural gift any more than the musician's fingers are bestowed by nature; and no pianist ran his scales more faithfully than I practised with cards in my room. I was, even in my teens, determined to be as fine a gambler as lived and I went at it thoroughly under the very excellent tutorage of an old fellow who, in his prime, had been one of the best.

He drank. His fingers were a bit slow one night in passing the bottom card to a confederate, and out of gratitude and friendship I paid for the funeral and monument. There it stands to this day, a shaft of marble among a field of solemn stones, and on it is the sardonic inscription—

As honest a man as ever palmed a card.

But I was young in those days. My family for some years did not speak my name even in the house where I was born. I was dead to all of them. It might have been different had I not been motherless at ten. Sisters, brothers, uncles, cousins, aunts—ours was and is yet a large and proud tribe—said I was born to be hanged; and the time came when they were considerate enough to remind me that—

"We told you so!"

A few words more to fill in some features of my background, for though this story is verifiable in the files of old San Francisco papers—not so very old at that—yet I wish to take the pains of making it credible without sending skeptics to dusty volumes of the *Chronicle*.

It has been my fortune, despite the attitude of eminently respectable relatives, even then as now, to have and to hold the friendship of a few fine and honest people who had what they called "faith" in me. This is, I suppose, largely because I never drank; never used an oath more than three or four times in my life; was invariably polite—as emotionless people are usually;

never made a threat—that is a direct one; and never made a promise that I did not keep.

It happened that a pickpocket whom I knew quite well—he was a miserable rascal, reduced by hop and whisky to purse-snatching—nipped a woman's bag in a crowd and gloated over the contents in my presence.

A handful of bills was in it, and such other stuff as a woman usually pokes into her bag. But there was also a letter, and on the envelope, of course, an address—Mrs. Mary Curwen. The dope-fiend tried to tell me what was in the letter. He offered it to me to read. His words were rather jumbled for he was half-drunk, but what he said was somewhat borne out by the return address on the envelope.

This miserable rat saw a chance for blackmail and was drunk enough to suggest that I engage with him. The envelope was from the office of a congressman of the San Francisco district. The pickpocket said it was written by Congressman Bryan—who was just making an announcement of his willingness to run for governor—to Mrs. Mary Curwen and that it spoke of a "dreadful secret."

I did not read the letter. As nearly as I could gather the "dreadful secret" was not revealed, but was suggested in some way that seemed to the pickpocket sufficient to establish a basis for "a piece o' graft."

What that basis was he didn't exactly know. He urged me to read it. He was very drunk, and I never quarrel with a drunken man. I took the letter and put it aside for a day or two. I was tantalizingly interested and tempted to read it.

There is no shame in being tempted—it is giving way to temptation that knocks the inner props down. I would no more have read a letter found in a ripped envelope than I would have read one in which I had no personal interest and which was sealed. Let me make myself clear on this point.

Had it served some purpose of importance to me, I would not only have opened another man's letter, but I would have cut into a mail bag to get at the letter. But I have a quirk of what may possibly be called honor which would let me as readily peep into a woman's bedroom as read a letter that does not concern me.

And I was intensely interested. Congressman Bryan was no political puppet. He was a comparatively young man and a dynamic, hard-fighting, out-spoken fellow, brilliant and courageous; a man who seemed to have arisen by sheer work and brilliancy. Naturally I admired him. For one thing, Thrope and his party were against Bryan.

I SHALL not give any particulars of the political fight, for those details do not concern the story. It so chanced that Bryan's releection to Congress had recently taken place, but he was willing to resign and run for governor. The State needed an honest governor. If Thrope should be elected, the skull-and-crossbones might as well have floated from the flagpole at Sacramento.

It was to be a hard and bitter campaign. It always was when Bryan and Thrope fought. One of the features of the Bryan workers' argument had always been the emphasis laid on the fact that he was a San Francisco boy orphaned in babyhood, whose whole life had been lived under the eyes of San Franciscans who might examine every feature of it and know that his record was stainless.

So I told the purse-snatcher that he was too drunk to have read straight.

I thought of returning the letter to Mrs. Curwen by mail; but, in case the letter did contain any matter that would trouble her if she knew it had passed under the eyes of strangers, she could not be reassured by anything I might write to accompany the letter itself.

So I returned the letter in person.

The house was a modest, solid little home; the yard was well kept, the lawn fresh, the shrubs trimmed, the paint new.

A young woman, neat and attractive—that is, intelligent of face as well as pretty, but with a wilful set to her lips—opened the door. She was slender and dark and, I judged, though nothing of an expert in matters of the kind, around twenty.

I asked for Mrs. Curwen and was shown into a little sun-lighted room.

Mrs. Curwen came in. My impression of strangers is always definite; I like them or I do not.

The moment I saw her I felt as deep sympathy for her as I ever felt for any one. Tragedy was written on her face, and worries were in her eyes. She had suffered at sometime or other, and deeply. Her eyes had the steady, wide-lidded stare of people who have been forbidden things and kept silent.

She was nervous and troubled, and I knew something of what the heavy lines that fell from her nostrils to the corners of her mouth meant. The mouth itself was drawn tightly; the full lips were thinned by having been set hard. Yet hers was a pleasant face lighted from an inner glow of contentment. I will call it a beautiful face. All beautiful faces have the mark of tragedy upon them.

She was tall, well-poised and, I would have guessed, somewhere above fifty—obviously the mother of the girl who had met me at the door.

"You wish to see me?" she asked.

I referred at once to a letter addressed to her that had come to my attention.

There was no mistaking the importance of that letter to her. At the first mention she stiffened as one does to receive a blow. I may have imagined it, but it seemed to me that she also assumed, for a second, a grim reconciliation to the blow that was expected. It was as if she rather knew blow after blow of some kind would reach her, and she had reached the age of passive resistance.

I then told her precisely what had happened and extended the letter.

"I do not know what the letter contains. I do not wish to know. It has been read only by a drunken fellow who may believe he merely dreamed what he read. And I have brought it in person so that you may be assured that nobody, except the fellow mentioned, has meddled with the contents."

She said nothing for a moment, but reached out a hand that trembled slightly and laid it on my arm, and the fingers closed for an instant in a way deeply expressive of gratitude.

Mrs. Curwen looked at me with a kind of suspended admiration in her eyes and asked—

"What did you say your name was?"

I told her. I had not at that time taken the name of Everhard. My family name is Richmond. I told her—"Don Richmond."

Almost incredulously she exclaimed:

"Don Richmond—you! A mere boy—and you are the man who struck Jim Thrope in the face? I—I—have often wondered about you. A mere boy!"

My shoulders stiffened a little as I remarked that I was twenty-four, and no doubt my manner implied that twenty-four was a full-grown, manly age.

"I understand," she said quietly, almost proudly as if in some way I was closely related to her, "why this letter has been returned—unread! And do you know, I would doubt almost any other man that brought it!"

I looked at her in puzzlement and asked—

"Do you know me?"

"Yes—I know that you hit Jim Thrope in a crowded dance-hall; hit him in the face before all of his friends. Yes indeed, I do know you!" And she impulsively caught my hand into both of hers and pressed it.

I did not understand.

With quick, maternal-like half-phrases she regretted that I was a gambler and lived such a life.

"A professional gambler for six years!" she exclaimed. "I knew you were young—but so young!"

She said that she had heard all about the affair—more even than was in the papers, some of which called me a young ruffian who was boasting he had insulted so distinguished and honorable a citizen as James H. Thrope. And one or two of the papers which told something like the truth colored it rather highly in my favor because they happened to be politically opposed to Thrope.

The basic fact, which nobody knew, was that I hated Thrope instinctively. His eyes—it is into the eyes that one looks for an understanding of people—were the insolent, lewd, vicious eyes of the bully.

I never saw him without wanting to strike him in the face. Something of what that meant may be conveyed when I explain that, in all the troubles I have been into and got out of, I have never struck a half-dozen men with my fists.

A NIGHT came when Thrope was on one of his periodical debauches and came into the Empress Dance-hall, where I chanced to be awaiting an appointment. He was sober enough, but this time it would probably not have made any difference to me if he had been drunk. A little fool of a dance-hall girl, ambitious to get attention from so distinguished a rounder, clutched at his coat.

He turned, at one glance saw that she was not pretty, then drove his fist into her face; and many people laughed. Thrope was always followed on such occasions by friends of the kind—by men who would laugh if a woman's face ran blood.

I had gone up to him. There was nothing of haste or hurry in my manner. I said distinctly that perhaps he did not know how it felt to be struck in the face; then deliberately hit him a back-handed blow squarely across the mouth. Blood dripped from his lips.

I said nothing more. Without turning my face from him, I pushed a chair out from behind me and took one backward step so that my shoulders were against the wall. I did not care to be shot or slugged from the rear.

I heard my name tossed back and forth. I was pretty well known. There was a scrambling and stamping as some people made for places where they thought bullets would be least likely to hit; and others, full of gaping curiosity, crowded close behind Thrope's back.

But nothing happened. I mean nothing of importance. I was cursed and threatened. Friends of Thrope's, who but a few seconds before had laughed, scowled and cursed. Bullies usually try to save their faces by scowls when they are not ready to venture further.

Thrope half swung his hand toward his hip. So far as he could see I was unarmed. But he did not draw, or try to draw. Perhaps he had heard—and believed—the rumor that the reason I had never been tried for any one of a few little gun-plays, was because I never made a move until it became evident that I had to shoot in self-defense.

There was perhaps a little truth in that report, though much exaggeration. In those days I used a single action .44—two of them—and I wore a double-breasted coat. I don't know whether automatics had been invented or not; anyway they were not worth considering.

The Colt is meant for quick work. They were worn, diagonally across my stomach and carried cocked. That helped to cultivate in me a slow, deliberate manner and a certain unbending attitude—much as would be cultivated in a man who carried dynamite in his pocket. All I needed to do to shoot quick was to thrust my hand inside the coat on a level with the stomach—an entirely unsuspicious movement—and, half-turning my body to point the gun, press the trigger.

Of course I shot through the coat. The gun was very awkward to carry there, but the awkwardness had compensations in dangerous moments. Thrope probably suspected that I would not be unagitated if I did not feel secure.

It is fair, perhaps, to say that he may have believed there were as many friends of mine as of his in the room; that the insult had been planned, and that he was in a trap prepared beforehand. I offer that as an explanation, for, though Thrope was intrinsically a coward, he was proud and high-tempered, and it hardly seems likely that I—though even then men of stronger nerves than his hesitated to take up my challenge—could have, by mere poise, so humiliatingly have bluffed him.

He cursed in the way of a man who does not mean to fight, promised me sudden death at some future time, intimating that it would not be far distant, either; then withdrew with his friends, who glowered over their shoulders.

The incident attracted much more attention than the mere facts warranted; all, of course, because James Thrope was a figure of importance.

So it was not surprizing that Mrs. Curwen knew of it.

The surprizing thing was the interest that this quiet and lovely woman, grayed and wrinkled, showed in an incident of the tenderloin.

I SUGGESTED that it was strange she should have paid so much attention to a mere affair of the underworld.

"I know of Jim Thrope," she said.

But I must pause to tell as nearly as I can how she said it. Bitterly came the words, "I know—" then a perceptible pause. The "of" seemed forced into the sentence, and "Jim Thorpe" was spoken almost in a whisper as if, only by overcoming a strong repugnance, could she speak his name. What that manner of saying "I know of Jim Thrope" conveyed to me is obvious.

"I know of Jim Thrope. I have often wondered why no man dared to treat him as he deserves!"

I assured her that there were many who dared; that Thrope was by no means regarded as the terror she seemed to think.

She seemed to doubt me.

When I started to go, her hand again touched my arm as if to check me.

"You will come to see me? To dinner? Helen and I are alone. We have few friends."

I suggested that she would probably have still fewer when it became known that she was friendly with me.

"You mean Thrope would do something?"

"I wasn't thinking of him but of your respectable neighbors. I am what is sometimes called a 'habitué of the tenderloin'."

She ignored that with a little gesture as if she knew too much about respectable people to care what they thought, and asked me anxiously if Thrope had made trouble for me since that affair.

He had not.

I did not go into details and explain to her that it was not an easy matter for anybody to make trouble for me unless they came to my face. I have known men and attended the funerals of some of them, who scorned the cowardly precaution of watching against shots and blows from the rear. I am not such a one.

I am very cautious. The more so because, though I always have had many friends, I have never used any of them as a body-guard. They have helped me many times. I have called on them often. What I mean is that I have always gone through darkened streets alone, if there was nothing but the suspicion that somebody might be lying in wait for me. My ears are keen, my hands are quick and I seldom miss. And I am never off guard, never to be taken unawares—if tense watchfulness is a preventive.

I have said that Thrope did not make trouble for me over the episode, then six months past; but, of course, I had no way of knowing whether the rooming-house in which I stayed had been fired because the incendiary wanted to burn me sleeping, or some one else in the house; or merely had a grudge against the proprietor.

I sleep lightly, too lightly for my own comfort. A creak, a voice at a distance, a draft puffing from an opened window, almost any sort of a noise, makes me at once alert. I had no way of knowing whether it was some one who had taken Thrope's money or who had mistaken me for another party, that sprang from a doorway one night, leaping for my back with an uplifted knife. Nothing was revealed of the man's identity at the inquest, for though I attended I was not called as a witness.

The instant I had shot I slipped into the doorway for a minute, then came out, pretending to be one of the scrambling crowd attracted by the report; and I did not remain long enough to have the police get mine among the names of those who had been first arrivals on the scene.

A few other little incidents of a much less menacing character than those just mentioned had happened within the six months, but I had no way of connecting them with Thrope.

So I assured Mrs. Curwen that Thrope had not, so far as I knew, made trouble.

She agitatedly assured me that he would. She begged me to leave the city, for a time any way:

"If he is waiting like that—it means you won't have a chance. Please, please, listen to me. I do know James Thrope! I know every villainous drop of blood in his body. He is the vilest man that ever lived! If that letter had got to his hands——" She flung her hands up to her face, and did not finish.

There were tears in her eyes when her hands dropped away, but she was more composed in manner. She said that she could never, never thank me enough! And wouldn't I please come again to see her—soon?

She said one thing that stayed with me, and things of sentiment do not usually remain long in my ears—

"I know Jim Thrope so well that I want to treat you as my son!"

"Helen," she said, calling to the young girl that came past the door.

"This is the young man that struck James Thrope in the mouth!"

The girl's dark eyes flashed, and I saw her body stiffen slightly. She was far different from the pleasant, smiling girl who had welcomed me at the door.

"Oh!" she said, and nothing more. But she watched me steadily, her face expressionless but hard set; and her eyes burned strangely.

It was days before I could get those people and that visit out of my mind, or rather into the background of my thoughts.

There was not only mystery, but mystery compounded. At the name of Thrope, Mrs. Curwen had become a woman of almost tragic intensity. I can not, and never could, let puzzling circumstances be forgotten until I have thought them over from every conceivable angle; and the most plausible conclusion I could arrive at—taking the Bryan letter into consideration, as could not be avoided—was that Mrs. Curwen had suffered from some unusual villainy at Thrope's hands and had confided with Congressman Bryan for what use he cared to make of it politically.

Since the pickpocket had mentioned "dreadful secret" and spoken of blackmail—though he had been drunk when he read the letter—I concluded that he had seen possibilities of extortion from her.

All that was, in a way, easy enough to settle. It really troubled my thoughts less than the continual reappearance of the dark, pretty girl, who smilingly had met me at the door, but having spoken only a monosyllabic "Oh!" stared at me with enigmatic tenseness while I was leaving.

I could not imagine what it meant. But James Thrope was real and omnipresent in that little home; his personality shadowed it—and yet, when I had first come in there had been every indication of happiness.

I didn't understand. I did not greatly care to understand, except in so far as I am annoyed by the incomprehensible. That is one reason I have taken some pains to keep out of the way of women, particularly of young ones. They all have something of Helen Curwen in them: something enigmatic, inexplicable, something that may be taken either as sinister or as worshipful.

Whether she hated me, or was tense and inarticulate from gratitude, for having laid my knuckles in Thrope's face was something that could not be distinguished by her manner. It might have been either. Whichever way it was, she was deeply shaken; and obviously Miss Curwen was a passionate, tense, volatile young woman.

III

I WAS soon given some other things to think about, though in a way these too had a bearing on Miss and Mrs. Curwen.

Zellers, the pickpocket, more familiarly known as "Hop"—probably an abbreviation of "Hop-Head"—had evidently not been so drunk as I thought. He had talked, apparently, a good deal about "his letter." He had talked promiscuously.

The fact that he told conflicting reports, and elaborated what the letter contained at every recital, did not at all minimize the interest his drunken blabbering had stirred up in a most surprizing fashion.

I began to have people speak to me about the letter. Some ventured to intimate that they would like to read it. Two fellows of Zellers' stripe, with himself hanging sheepishly at their coat-tails, came to demand it of me. It was Zellers' letter. Not mine.

I ought to give it up, *et cetera, et cetera,* to the point of intimating that I had appropriated it for a little personal graft on my own behalf. For fellows who had put on such an assertive manner and talked at such length, they made rather abrupt apologies, and retired without knowing any more about the letter than when they came.

What I thought must certainly be the climax arrived the day after I had returned the letter in the presence of a stranger who introduced himself as Edwin Ellis and asked for a private conversation. He was obviously from the other world—the business world. He had brains and a knowledge of men in general, but I fancy that I added a little to his store of information concerning men in particular.

Mr. Edwin Ellis was a small man, neat as a burnished rapier and much like that most flexible, subtle and sharpest of all weapons. He opened with commendable directness, scrutinizing my face with flintlike gray eyes, and perhaps wondering how a young man of my age could have the reputation I had.

"I understand," he said in a straight businesslike manner and tone, "that you have come into possession of a letter from the office of Congressman Bryan."

A pause. His manner was sharply interrogatory. I said nothing.

"Am I correct?"

"Go on," I replied noncommittally.

"There is no occasion to go on until I have assurance on that point."

"Very well," I said.

I was curious, of course. I didn't want him to get away without knowing why he came. But the supreme schooling in Bluff is had at the green table.

"You decline to answer yes or no?"

"I see no reason for answering yes or no until I understand why you ask."

He paused thoughtfully, not once shifting his eyes from mine. I reflected that he would have made a fine poker player; but I guessed that he had probably chosen law.

It, too, is a fine game for clever crooks. An honest lawyer—that is, honest in spirit rather than merely scrupulously observant of what is called the "ethics of the profession—" will, I am sure, become as familiar with empty pockets as an honest gambler. He was, I found later, not a lawyer but a detective, and from the East; so different from such detectives as I knew that he had none of their mannerisms.

Mr. Ellis and I lapsed into silence. We would probably have remained all through the afternoon and all night, too, if he had not at last decided that I did not intend to say anything more until he advanced the conversation.

He did, with customary directness, thus—

"I am prepared to pay you any reasonable sum you may ask if you place the letter in my hands."

Figuratively, I sat up and took notice. Actually, I did not let a muscle of face or finger move.

"Reasonable?"

My intonation finished the question, made it explicit: how much did he consider the maximum of "reasonable"? I was really anxious to know of how much importance, measured in terms of money, that letter was considered.

With the air of a man who thought he was driving home his bargain, he said—

"Ten thousand!"

I let a second or two pass, then barely shook my head, but made no other reply.

That got under his armor. He exclaimed—

"You've read the letter—you know you can't possibly get more than that out of it?"

"How do you know its contents?" I asked quickly.

"I don't," he said as quickly. "But I know who the concerned parties are, and I know what they will pay."

"Concerned parties—how do you mean?"

"I will mention no names. No names." A pause. Then— "But how much will you take to give the address—the address of that letter?"

I wondered whether he was after information, after the address on that letter, or whether he wanted to find out whether or not I would give it up; or if possibly that it was a subtle play on his part to get some reassurance that I did have the letter. Again he might fear—or hope—that the letter had got out of my possession without my having noted the address.

I won't give further details of the conversation. In much the same manner as already related, I at last succeeded in getting him to offer five hundred dollars for the address, and I declined without comment.

It must be made plain that this Edwin Ellis was no ordinary person. He did not lose his temper, and he was straight business all the way; but, having discovered nothing of value, he prepared to go.

"Young man," he said quietly but rather impressively. "I did not believe a fraction of what I had heard of you—I made inquiries before coming. I have rather altered my opinion. You have brains, you have nerve and you are stubborn. Of course, what I want is the letter. But there is some altruism in my pointing out to you that any party or parties who are prepared to offer a voluntary blackmail of ten thousand dollars for the recovery of that letter will not be likely to hesitate at violence."

I thanked him, for he had been gentlemanly about it. But I have heard that as a child, as a mere baby, the surest way of getting me to do something was by threatening to punish me if I did it, which, of course, is only a kind of legend that my family kept alive to illustrate a certain stubbornness that has not wholly left me.

"Will you tell me this," he asked with a frank directness that I liked; "how much more is the other side bidding for that letter? Maybe I can meet it?"

I was tempted to tell him that there had been no other bid; but he would probably have thought I was lying—and that might have led to unpleasant complications—so I kept silent, beyond replying that I could say nothing.

The situation had reached the intensity where I felt it my right to know something definite about that letter, or at least to talk it over with Mrs. Curwen.

I went to her home. No one was in. The neighbors did not know where she was. She and her daughter had been gone for some days. It was evident that the departure had been sudden, for the neighbor on the right declared she and Mrs. Curwen were "the best of friends," were always running in and out of each other's back door, that Mrs. Curwen was a lovely woman, and that she had said nothing of planning to go away.

So I went my way and wished sincerely that I had had no scruples about prying into the content of that letter. I could have kept silent and lied. I am excellent at keeping silent, and on crucial occasions I am not likely to be called a liar—no matter what I say. I tell the truth more frequently than is comfortable because I have an aversion to lying: for one thing, I don't like to give any man credit for being too formidable for me to dare tell him the truth.

And then, too, there is something contemptible about lying—except when it becomes magnificent, a thing that can happen to no man more than once or twice in a lifetime, and then inevitably in connection with some woman's fate.

A poet, the one poet that I read, has said:

> "If there be trouble to herward,
> And a lie of the blackest can clear—
> Lie—while thy lips can move,
> Or a man is alive to hear."

My own regard for women is not that great; but my admiration for men who have such a regard for them is excessive.

THOSE remarks have not led me so far from my story as may appear; but to get back to that letter: Zellers waylaid me at every corner and whined for his letter. I would not explain; as well have tried to explain to a leech that it should not suck blood. Naturally he thought I was playing a lone graft, and he became something more than objectionable—a pest.

He circulated whatever report of me he felt like among whatever crowd gave him a drink. I did not greatly care about that. What people think of me is their own business, and I seldom interfere except when they meddle with my business—at such times I am at pains to correct wrong impressions of me, for people who judge me aright do not often try to meddle.

But when Zellers, accompanied by three men this time, two of them recognizable as liegemen of James Thrope, came at me in a body and tried to talk what they called "business," I thought the time had come to be firm.

I was told pointedly that Thrope had "it in for me," and that of course I knew what that meant; but that Thrope was interested in Zellers' letter, and if I would give it up, I could name my price.

I suggested that Mr. Thrope's interest could not be so very great, since he had not come in person; and I said that if I heard any more about that letter of the same nature that had been coming back to me through friends that had listened to Zellers, I might give it up on the stipulation that Zellers was permanently silenced—and that I did not greatly care how!

The little malevolent rat was thoroughly frightened. He knew that the methods of obtaining silence in that quarter of the city ranged from Chinese hatchet-men to an overdose of chloral, from a blow in the dark to being pitched with tied hands and weighted feet into the bay.

Thrope's men made their bid, a somewhat larger one than Mr. Ellis had offered, so I imagined that, he having failed, men thought to be more nearly in my class were delegated to try their persuasive power; and they retired with somewhat more direct threats than Mr. Ellis had suggested. I was under the impression that Ellis himself was a Thrope man.

Zellers went with them, but he came furtively to me later in the evening. He was frightened. He whined as usual about being a poor fellow who needed a little honest money, and declared he knew that I wouldn't throw over a good friend like himself.

According to his interpretation of our "friendship," which on my part had never extended beyond giving him an occasional dollar or so for drugs and booze, though he always asked for the money under the euphemism of "food," we had been rocked in the same cradle and maintained a sort of Damon-Pythian friendship.

"Youse 'undn't trow me over fer dis bunch o' graf'ers, 'udju?"

I suggested that he tell me what was behind all this effort and rumor about that letter.

He didn't know. He really didn't. His memory was none of the best and, having been drunk at the time of reading it, he didn't know what was in the letter; but his imaginative tongue had overcome that little handicap until, by his report, the letter contained enough specific information to have convicted Congressman Bryan of compounded felony and implicated any number of other persons. He did not remember the party to whom the letter was addressed, but it was a woman and there was some kind of an intimate relation between her and Bryan.

That information, of course, did much to explain why such a persistent effort was being made to get hold of it.

The report had circulated among the tenderloin that Zellers had made a lucky find of "something" on Bryan; the report had percolated up into the ears of Thrope, and he would have any day given an arm to "get something on" Bryan. Political enemies never were more bitter.

My interest in the letter dropped to almost zero when I arrived at that conclusion. I told Zellers he had better make haste to start a contradictory report, because if the letter was produced Thrope and his gangsters would probably be furious to find he had so misled them.

He was shaken, but wanted to see the letter. I told him that I had sent it to the party whose name was on the envelope. He wanted the name and received the answer that might be expected.

So I thought the episode of the letter was definitely settled.

Then Mr. Ellis again called on me.

He laid down ten one thousand dollar bills, said—

"There you are, sir," took up his hat and started to go without another word.

But he seemed amused—not amused exactly, but possessed of a great deal of knowledge that he didn't intend to reveal. It was my turn to ask questions, and I did. He knew as much about silence and evasiveness as I had on the previous occasion.

"Why the money?"

"It belongs to you."

"Marked?" I asked, eying the bills. An easy way to get a man into the penitentiary is by marked bills.

"Examine them."

"You could have kept a record of the numbers."

"Certainly," he admitted.

"But why offer this? I told you before——"

"I am not offering it. I am leaving it. The money is yours."

It irritates me to be puzzled. I looked at him for some time and said nothing. Neither did he. I wasn't in the mood to play a waiting game: it was I who wanted information this time.

"Tell me something definite—or take the money."

"Certainly," he said politely, with a slight, well-mannered trace of amusement. "The party I represent—though very severely condemned in certain quarters—is a man of his word. The letter which we know to have passed through your hands has been placed in the hands of the party to whom it belongs. Hence the price agreed upon. I would have given it to you before but I only lately learned all the facts. I congratulate you, sir, on your discretion and honesty."

With that he went out and left me standing there, ten thousand dollars on the table and ten thousand questions tugging at my thoughts.

IV

SO THE letter had been delivered, but, I said to myself, the party who received it had paid the wrong person. That was something for him to worry about, not for me.

Yet Edwin Ellis did not look like the sort of man who would make mistakes of the kind.

I tried to find out something about him, but he was a stranger in the city. He had stayed at the Palace, had registered his address as "city," and disappeared the day following his mistake.

I again tried to locate Mrs. Curwen, but she had not returned, had not been heard from.

There was one way I could probably find out something. I had thought of it many times. I had even written and destroyed one letter to Congressman Bryan, who had returned and was opening his campaign in the southern part of the State. I came near writing another, but decided that I might as well let the matter drop.

It was not really a decision so much as the fact that something else of a different nature happened which interfered with my affairs. Some days later I left San Francisco for a time—took a little trip toward Honolulu. In fact, I was so anxious to go that I went on a windjammer. I decided to travel along about midnight and passed the Golden Gate about dawn.

I had known ever since the little incident with Thrope that the police, in their vernacular, wanted to "get something on me." It is easy enough for the police to "get something" on anybody, but they had to get something definite and serious on me to make a case of it. For though Thrope was what is known as the "man higher up" in San Francisco at that time, I was a member in good standing of the gamblers who gave the police and the "men higher up" a large share of their graft.

It happened that "Spike" Delaney was what is known as the "boss" of the underworld; and Delaney was a hard-fisted, independent fellow who, though hand in glove with Thrope, yet stood on his own two feet and could not be worked over like putty to any purpose that did not appeal to him.

Delaney liked me; and Delaney—who was just about as square as a man of his position could be; which means little more than that he was square with the people he liked—would have thrown a wrench into the wheels of any ordinary frame-up designed to stow me in San Quentin.

I seldom played in tenderloin dives. There were two or three up-town "clubs," known on the q.t. to sporty rich men and their sons, and especially to tourists, where I sat in usually.

And I must pause here to say that I did not always or even frequently cheat. I gambled first because I liked it, only secondarily to make a modest living. There is no sport in sure-thing gambling; I mean there is no thrill, none of the thrilling impact of bluff and luck as one studies the inscrutable face across the table and wonders whether to call or raise, or do neither.

I must say here, too, though perhaps I shall not generally be believed, that I stacked and dealt from the bottom more times for the benefit of fellows who knew nothing about how their luck had changed than ever I did for myself.

Despite what many wise card players maintain, a deck can be stacked in the shuffle—if there are not more than three, or at the most four, players; but in a half-dozen riffles of the cards I can put a good hand at the bottom and deal it at will though the eyes of twenty men are on me. There is no way to tell when a good man is actually dealing from the bottom.

There is one way to tell when he actually is not: that is, if he holds the deck, as most people do—and professional gamblers never, unless under suspicion—with the forefinger of the left hand pressed against the *front*, and not the side—where the other three fingers are—of the deck.

It happened that Delaney one afternoon asked me to sit in at a certain table in the back of his saloon. Some friends of his had told him they were bringing on a "live one"; and as Delaney's best houseman was on a periodical drunk, I was requested to make sure that the fellow's fat pocketbook did not leave with him. Delaney had made a similar request two or three times before. It was pretty well known that when the houseman went on a bat I would take his place.

The table was put apart in a little private room. Two other men, strangers to me, but O. K.'d by Delaney, sat in the game; then a fellow, a regular Delaney come-on, brought in the "live one"— a Mr. Smith, the name evidently being taken as a convenience for a little fling at high life.

IT TOOK me just about three hands to discover that there were only two poker players at that table. Whoever had picked Mr. Smith for a sucker, a greenhorn, had made a monumental mistake. I knew it the minute I saw him pick up the deck. He tried to be awkward enough in the shuffle, but the position of his fingers as he dealt made me cautious about putting much faith in the three fair queens that came into my hand.

He played with that cool, steely quality that marks the real gambler and can not be assumed: it comes only after years of tense play, and to some men not even then.

I drew to the three queens, of course, although it cost a neat little sum, for everybody was staying. I was presented with two fives—flip, flip, just like that. Smith helped himself to three cards. It doesn't make any difference what the others drew.

A modest bet was made on my right. It was up to me to call, raise or quit. I carelessly tossed my hand away—and caught the expression in Smith's eyes as he saw me do it. I had wanted to see his face—not his hand.

But I saw the hand anyway. Smith threw it away—face up—and disclosed a pair of tens. He had palmed whatever else had been used to strengthen the hand, if indeed he had not relied on the fellow to his right who took the pot without being called. I saw Smith, however, dispose of the palmed cards.

I did not see the cards, for one never does when a skilful man has them, but he casually reached out and touched the discards, and when the hand was withdrawn there were three cards, one precisely on top of the other. Quite good—and incidentally, I made a note for my own future benefit of the fact that one should never deposit palmed cards in the discards without pretending to gather the cards up.

Nobody would, with their eyes open, ordinarily go to the trouble of trying to fleece a professional gambler. But here was a frame-up of some kind. Had these men learned that on the day before I had been given ten thousand dollars? Was Delaney in on the deal, or had he too been imposed on. Naturally the situation prodded my temper.

The climax was delayed for some time, but it came in an unexpected flash. I was dealing: both hands were engaged. Smith said—

"You're dealing from the bottom!"

And a muzzle of his gun appeared above the edge of the table.

As a matter of fact, I had not been dealing from the bottom. I was caught unprepared. There was nothing to do but sit motionless, hands across the table, holding the deck and a card that I had about to toss.

"You tin-horn," he said, "will you leave town by train or by hearse?"

I glanced right and left. The three other men at the table showed no surprize. They had known what was coming. I had been caught in a little frame-up. I guessed that Delaney knew of it and had insisted that I be given the chance to leave town.

There is a peculiar psychology in crooks: they knew I had not been cheating; they knew that I knew I had not been cheating; and yet they pretended to think I had so as to have an excuse to order me out of town.

I did not intend to go. I did not intend to promise to go. I let the deck slip quietly, at the same time raising my hands and sitting back in the chair—straightening up with hands raised, symbolic of surrender.

I had never advertized the fact that I wore a gun across my stomach, for half the efficacy of the device and position was in the fact that no one expected it to be there. But I couldn't possibly reach for it while covered. It would have been sheer idiocy.

I turned to the come-on who had introduced Smith into the game and said—

"Search me—so I can drop my hands and talk."

He looked inquiringly at Smith, and Smith nodded.

He removed the gun from my hip, ran his hand all around my trouser's band and tapped me right and left under the shoulders for a shoulder holster. I sat with stomach drawn in to do something to keep the gun from accidentally coming in contact with his fingers. He was satisfied.

I sat down, lowered my hands and tapped my fingers, moving them about with nervous gestures that I did not feel.

"Now just what is the proposition?" I asked.

"A train or hearse—and that goes."

His hand lay on the table, circling the handle of the revolver. A twist of the wrist and a pressure of the trigger was all that he need give. He had put the gun that had been taken from me into his own holster. It was a good gun.

Suddenly the table raised up, the round top like a great buckler cutting me off momentarily from Smith's eyes. But he fired anyway. The bullet splintered through the top of the table.

I had had to use both hands to tilt the table between us. I had had to have a tenth of a second of safety in which to reach under the breast of my coat for the gun. I don't care how subtle or quick a man is, he can't move quicker than the fellow with the drop can pull a trigger.

I was afraid to try to slip my hand up under the coat gradually, for suspicion might be aroused and another search made. And it would have been inviting death to have made an abrupt gesture. And though it took me longer to heave up that table, and the gesture was more conspicuous, yet it was safer.

Any one who doubts need only sit at a table and try the two movements. Smith was used to men reaching for a gun: he knew what that gesture meant, and the moment a hand flashed from sight he would have shot. But he was not used to tables rising. Both my hands were in sight, the fingers above the edge of the table—but the thumbs were not. He hesitated to see what was happening, then shot—too late.

When Delaney and some of the people in the saloon came on the bound, they found two men facing my gun with hands lifted.

The man called Smith lay crumpled and limp on the floor, face down—in a witch's mirror of blood. He was dead.

I WAS cornered. The room had no windows and but one door. It was a small room, a poker room, and the one door was filled. Delaney stood in it, a gun in either hand and behind him rank on rank of men—risking their lives for the chance to crane a neck over the shoulder of the fellow in front.

"Spike," I said, "you've trapped me. Shoot if you want to commit suicide."

He might have been able to kill me—but not before a bullet would have been on its way toward him.

He started to speak, but I cut him short. There was no time to lose. Quickly, sharply, I told him that if he did not want to commit suicide to turn around, face the crowd with leveled guns and clear a way for me, for I was going to follow him with a gun pressed against the small of his back. I let it be known that if anybody made a move at me, I would get him, Delaney, first.

Spike Delaney turned his back and filled the door, and he put a lot of feeling into the words that he spoke to the crowd.

But there would be three men behind my back the moment my face was turned. I knew they were armed—or at least I never found out that they were not. There was no time to search.

"Down on your knees and face that way," I said, indicating the wall.

They went down and grotesquely assumed an attitude of prayer. Perhaps they were praying, as cowards do.

Then I realized that after I took five steps out into the saloon I would have even more men behind me, some of whom would not be cowards.

"Step slow, Spike, and step carefully," I said and pressed my shoulders against his own.

One gun, which I had recovered from Smith, I poked against Delaney's side; with the other I kept the people through whom we passed, not covered exactly, but bluffed. Spike was roaring right and left.

"Can't you see he'll kill me if you don't get out of the way—get, you ——!"

Spike was eloquent when aroused, but his words were not choice. People in that part of the town were used to obeying Spike Delaney; and, too, none of those around about appeared to be friends of Smith's—and it is only the police who go out of their way to fight with the victor of a duel. So we got through to the alley door safely enough.

"God, that was a clever stunt!" said Spike when we had cleared the crowd.

"Drop those guns. Face about." He did. "I never thought you would double-cross me," I said.

"I'd 'a' shot quick," he said. "You'd better go through. Keep up the bluff—tell me to beat it back toward the bar!"

It dawned on me that Spike Delaney did not know that he lured me into a trap by asking me to take the place of his houseman in that poker game, and I understood why with so much alacrity he had cleared the way through the crowd for me: he was gladly helping me make a getaway.

There was no time to parley so I sent him toward the bar and sprang through the alleyway door and was gone.

Let some one who knows explain why it is that a gambler always carries all the money that he has. I do not know. I only know that they all do it, and one of the things I was long in getting used to was a checking account.

My bank was my inside vest pocket. If I happened to be pretty well capitalized, I used both vest pockets and the hip. All the money that I had was on me; and when one is departing in a hurry that is the main thing—money.

I knew that I had to keep out of sight for a while. The three witnesses had been there ready to have sworn that Smith murdered me in self-defense; and they would as readily declare that I had shot him when he wasn't looking. Such evidence would have convicted a more innocent man than myself, a man with less powerful enmity directed at him from James Thrope.

Delaney's friendship was valuable, but he could not without trouble for himself have bucked a combination such as I was up against. Besides, his regard for me was one only of friendship; his relation with Thrope and the police and judges was one of business.

When I was younger even than at that time, I used to vow that I would never run, never be a fugitive. I swore to stand and see it through—"it" being anything that might happen. But I have run frequently, far and fast. I ran that night—figuratively, of course, for nothing would so readily have started pursuit as for me to have been seen flying along.

I WENT down to the water-front and poked about cautiously. I did not want to be seen, that is to be noticed particularly, for I knew Thrope would urge the police to "do their duty" when he heard of what had happened. But I was not without a few friends scattered through the water-front saloons.

I have friends everywhere—I have always had them every place. That does not mean I am such a person as people are eager to know and help, though outside of my own family very few people have been ashamed to have their names linked with mine; but I like friends, particularly I like the so-called outcasts, who are the best and most loyal friends.

And I try never to refuse any man a favor so long as he is not up to some sort of deviltry that even my slack code occasionally, but at such times rigidly, refuses to countenance. I was young in those days, and youth likes vivid phrases; so I told myself that all of us, gamblers, crooks of one kind and another, belonged to the Legion of the Damned—and should go to ——— together.

I have recovered a little from such imaginative crudities; but in doing so I have lost something irrecoverable of the zest of life. This flickering of reminiscence is intended to throw a little light on the fact that the reason I hovered watchfully that night at the rear of the Ship Saloon was because the bartender then on watch—as I could see by peeping through the door—was one Sam Tyler.

Sam Tyler was a sailorman, who, recovering consciousness after a free-for-all in Delaney's saloon, found himself not only empty of pockets, but with a cracked head and broken thigh. And because Sam Tyler, who was a stranger to me, had provoked the fight, taken on all-comers, fought a good fight and gone down without a murmur to accept the savage punishment that befalls the vanquished in a bar-room brawl, he went to the hospital—into private room—and I paid the bill.

His sheepish explanation, made from lips barely visible amid a swathing of bandages had been that he always ended a jag with a fight. But his forecastle days were over the doctors said the thigh would always be stiff and likely to cause pain.

So he had settled down to the comparative quiet of night bartender at the Ship Saloon, where he could get all the sea-news and keep in touch with old friends; among whom, though I knew less of sailing than a farm hand, he included me.

Three men were at the bar drinking and talking. It took me some time to attract Sam's attention, but I was cautious because I did not want him to be embarrassed the next day when the police came asking after a man of my description, if witnesses should happen to be around to call him a liar in case he denied having seen me.

When Sam found out who it was and got a suspicion of why I was there, he set a bottle of whisky on the bar, told his customers to help themselves and keep tab—the last as a perfunctory concession to his duty—and came to the alley, standing in the half-closed door.

I told him that I thought I needed a little sea air.

He told me that the *Eliza Jane* had cleared the day before for Sydney; he could have put me on to her and no questions asked. The *Northern Belle* was due in ten days, and he and her skipper were old friends.

In my impatience, it seemed that he mentioned every ship that had ever been sent down the ways to a baptism of salt spray; it seemed that he knew all about her movements and the personnel of her crew, who her skipper was and his character, whether or not one could offer him money for a "safe" passage. Such a profusion of sea gossip was maddening—although I kept an attentive pose. I didn't understand what it meant. I did not realize that he was talking of his great passion, the sea and her ships—the strong passion of strong men: stronger than love of women, for sailors leave women in every port to sing the ho-heave-ho of the creaking capstan.

At last he thought of what a normal man would have thought of the first thing. Two of the three men in there drinking at the bar at that moment were off the *Jessie Darling*—the mate and second officer they were, and waiting then for the captain. The *Jessie Darling* left at dawn. She was short-handed.

I protested. I have an aversion to unnecessary manual labor; and I have found very little of it that ever appealed to me as necessary.

The *Jessie Darling* was a little schooner recently out of copra trade in the South Seas, more recently refitted and dressed, and—well, he gave the history of the *Jessie Darling*, but he was rather in ignorance as to her future. He didn't know who owned her. The mate did, but the mate had looked wise and said it was secret. Perhaps he did not know. Ships with secrets are fine for trouble, was the information Sam gave me with a sigh as if he had remembered a childhood sweetheart.

He swore abruptly, jerked off his white apron, flung it down and declared:

"I'm goin' with you! To —— with me spliced leg!"

My bump of caution is enormous. It always has been large. A hard blow over the head will raise a bump and I had got some buffetings that made caution prominent in my life. Sam was for rushing in with arms wide-flung and announcing that we had decided to throw in our fortunes with the *Jessie Darling*. However, he merely introduced me as a friend and took it for granted that I would soon come into the conversation.

They plainly had no wish to cultivate my acquaintance: a condition that I sensed at once and respected. Besides they were all a little drunk. Moreover, as they were waiting for the captain, I thought I might as well wait too and make my proposition directly to him.

They talked and drank. I leaned over the bar, sipping a glass filled from the proprietor's own private bottle—of tea—and let Sam talk while I listened to them. I was tempted into this because they so many times dropped their voices into furtive, loud whispers, and did so no doubt under the impression that they were concealing what they had to say from prying ears.

Caution and suspicion are two very important characteristics in my make-up. So when I chanced to hear the phrase "—— old hypocrite" used in a way that seemed to refer to the captain, and immediately followed by a prophecy that he would be "shown," I began to pay very close attention, indeed, to the two mates and the third party to whom they paid a certain deference.

I gathered a number of things; among which that the *Jessie Darling* was likely to steer another course than that intended by the owner—who was also to be shown a thing or two. Just what the nature of the revelation would be I could not surmise from what was said.

However, it seemed that the *Jessie Darling* was being much sought after for passenger purposes—the third man, called Tom by the mates, was also waiting to make terms for passage with the captain. The mates were the ordinary tough-fibered, big breasted men of the sea, neither of them, I judged, under thirty-five.

The captain came in. He was a tall saturnine fellow, with deep-set eyes and a prominent nose and huge fists. He was a sea-going man all right: grizzled, furrowed, and hard.

THE atmosphere was chilled the moment he came through the door. The look in his eyes did it, the look he fastened on the three men as he came up.

"Mr. Swanson," he said frigidly, "why aren't you on board?"

The mate replied that it was all right, that the owner himself was on board and had him to come ashore on an errand. With a drunken snicker he added—

"He's got his girl with him."

The captain was plainly infuriated, but he kept very quiet. Only his eyes told the story as he turned toward the bar and asked for a drink. Swanson asked him to drink with them, but the captain coldly declined.

"Mr. Thompson—fren' o' mine—doctor—for his health 'd like passage," said Mr. Swanson, laboring with an introduction and embarrassed by something more than whisky.

I remember having heard some place—my knowledge of the sea and its ways is vague—that the mate, though under the direction of the captain, is responsible only to the owner, and that a captain can not dismiss a mate as he can any other member of the crew. Obviously the captain disliked the mate, and I suppose some strong influence kept him from summarily ridding himself of Swanson. As it was the captain said briefly and with decision—

"No passengers."

That was not pleasing to me.

Sam Tyler began to talk. He rambled on: said he used to be a sailor and was tired of dust and noise. Why, it wouldn't take two cents for him to throw his apron off and go to sea again! The captain asked a few questions, a few quick nautical questions—but I did not listen further.

Behind my back I was hearing Swanson whisper:

"You come out between three an' four. I'll have somebody on the lookout an' stow you away. An' after we get two days out ——" The mate gave the captain a look that indicated the events two days later would be highly disadvantageous to the captain.

"I'll be there," said Thompson.

He left.

The captain was saying to Sam:

"If you want to go as a boy all right. If you are A. B. so much the better. I'll give you the rate soon as you make it."

They left, and left me talking with the proprietor, who grumbled and roared and drank something stronger than tea, because he had been awakened from sleep to come down and fill the place of the bartender who had gone a-rambling.

In saying good-by to Sam I managed to tell him that he would probably see me later, but for him to keep his eyes and ears open and his mouth shut.

I talked with the proprietor. I let him think that I was going across to Oakland and from there in an auto toward Los Angeles. I dropped this information calculatingly, as if with no intention of letting him divine what I had in mind.

Then I went to the pier from which I heard Thompson say he would leave at three o'clock.

I waited some time. A figure moved into the shadows, detached itself presently from the gloom, and Thompson looked into the muzzle of a gun, gasped and raised his hands with that suddenness which shows good judgment on the part of a victim.

Then I backed him into the shadows for a little talk.

Captain Whibley, I told him, was perhaps not such a fool as he appeared; and since Captain Whibley did not care to have him on the *Jessie Darling* it would perhaps be well to explain to me—to convince me why I should disobey the captain's wish in the matter and let him get on board.

I don't know why it is that men, always when in a position similar to that in which Thompson found himself, say the first thing—

"Who are you?"

I explained—briefly—that I had not taken the trouble of meeting him to give information, but to get it.

"That —— —— —— Swanson's give me the double-cross!"

"Don't be so quick to suspect Swanson," I told him. "You both made the mistake of not taking Captain Whibley into your confidence."

To make a short interview still shorter I may say I found out the day of mutiny and piracy and treasure-trove searching was not entirely vanished from the sea. Thompson knew, or said he did—had maps anyway—where there was a pirate cache on one of the Ladrones. His idea was with the connivance of mates and crew to take the *Jessie Darling* and find the loot a hundred or so years old.

Hunting for gold on a desert island never appealed to me as an enticing pastime. I have gone on a treasure hunt or two, but I didn't intend to go on the *Jessie Darling*. It was one thing to be dodging the San Francisco police for a justifiable homicide; it was quite another to be dodging the maritime police of all nations for mutiny and piracy.

There was no doubt about the proposed mutiny succeeding; two mates, and six of the ten members of the short-handed crew were already acquainted with the plot.

I perhaps could have won the gratitude of Captain Whibley by acquainting him with the facts; but conspiring seamen are good liars, and I had nothing to prove my tale but a few pocket-worn charts which I removed from Thompson. Besides, attention would be attracted to my own identity before the *Jessie Darling* cleared the bay.

Once the police had their hands on me I would be in for a trial. From the lofty heights of his bossdom, Thrope would put on the pressure and if I escaped with a life sentence I would be lucky. Spike Delaney could do much. I did not know how much.

I did not know how much he would even be willing to try to do, for his business was so intertwined with the police graft and so subject to Thrope's approval that friendship would not be likely to count. I preferred to go to sea. Having got to sea, then I could meet the situations as they developed.

So, as often in complications of the kind, I bluffed. It was easy. Thompson thought Captain Whibley knew all about the conspiracy. The *Jessie Darling* was sailing before sunrise.

I took possession of the maps and told Thompson it was lucky for him that Captain Whibley was so anxious to sail that he did not stay even one day over to prefer charges against him. With that I let Thompson go on his way—never to be heard from again in my affairs—and I found a launch and was taken out to the ship.

The launch man did not want to put out his lights and shut off his engine as he approached the *Jessie Darling*, but a little money is very persuasive.

As we came alongside a low voice hailed us—

"Mr. Thompson."

"Righto," I answered.

I had a speech ready in case the lookout knew Thompson, but he didn't; that was obvious by the way he took it for granted that I was he.

"Where's Swanson?" I asked.

"Sleepin' it off. He an' the old man had words. Y'see, the owner's aboard—with his girl. Swanson'll see you in the mornin'."

The man led me down to a stuffy little hole. I found out afterward that it was the steward's room, but the Chinese steward slept in the galley with the Chinese cook. Two Chinamen can sleep in a match-box and have plenty of room left.

The man left me, saying he "guessed he'd turn in."

His back was scarcely turned before a low knock at the door set me tense. I had hoped for an hour or so respite anyway.

I opened the door, and Sam Tyler limped in grinning.

Tyler—again at sea—had been too happy to sleep, and besides he wanted to see if I made it on board. So he had sprawled under a boat to soak in the watery air and watch.

I made my story brief and complete. It was the truth, clear down to the shooting of Smith and the need to go on the trip. I had only told Sam before that there had been "trouble" and I needed rest.

He whistled softly and grinned.

"This is goin' to be good," was his comment.

"Who owns this schooner?" I asked.

He said that he did not know. He had asked, but none of the men seemed to know.

He had heard, too, that the owner was on board with "his girl."

"His daughter?" I inquired.

"Don't know—maybe somebody else's daughter. Usually is on mystery ships. What're we goin' do?"

"Sleep," I told him.

V

I DID not sleep late, but I lay in the bunk long after I had dressed. I had nothing to do but think, and I let thoughts come and go as it pleased them.

The bustling around, the shouting and clamor, the creak of the donkey-engine and the gentle sway of the moving ship pleased me: we were under weigh.

A Chinaman, a Cantonese, came down with coffee and rice about nine o'clock.

"What is your name?" I asked.

He shook his head slightly, but there was no expression on his face: a rather old empty face, and a Chinaman's face can be blank and empty as the inside of a scooped cantaloup.

"You are the steward?"

He nodded slightly.

"I may want to use your room for some time. Here."

I offered him a bit of money.

He took it as one takes his dues, and without comment, without expression.

"Can't you talk?"

He looked at me hard for some seconds and turned away and went out, saying nothing.

It is very easy to offend a Chinaman; but it is not easy to offend one to such an extent that he will show that he has been offended—until some time later when a hatchet or a knife acquaints one with the fact.

I had always kept out of trouble with the Chinamen, which was the more unusual because I knew many of them and was close friends with seven or eight. They are—

without exception—the cleverest gamblers in the world, and though this is largely due to the fact that they are the most crooked, they have the qualities of poise and bluff but, excepting the Cantonese, are not particularly distinguished for what in the Occident is regarded as courage.

They prefer to meet a man from behind rather than to his face: a Saxon doesn't feel that he has paid an enemy unless that enemy knows who has struck him to death; but a Chinaman's soul, and the soul of almost any Oriental, is satisfied with poison or a blow from the dark.

About noon Swanson came down.

I don't know what he was intending to say, but I imagine something indicative of surprize. He got his surprize from another angle.

In about twenty words I gave him a calling down that he could not soon forget, pointing out that he was a fine fellow to put any faith in—to go to bed drunk when important work was to be done. Why had he not been on deck to meet Thompson and me when we came? Why had he waited until half the day was gone before coming near me? A fine fellow to have to trust!

Where was Thompson?

If he, Swanson, had not been drunk and asleep when we came he might have learned.

Yes, I was the man that had loafed around in the Ship's bar. I was also the man who was a friend of the bartender's. I was the man who had "something on" Thompson; and I had impressed upon Thompson the need of taking me into the game. Swanson was invited to notice that Sam Tyler was on board; and he was invited to consider the matter of going on with the game under the new deal or trying to get out and save his own hide, in which case he would probably share the fate of the captain of whom we mutineers would soon dispose.

The lookout had not told him Thompson came with me?

Of course, the lookout hadn't. The lookout knew nothing: he had said the mate was asleep, and I had known that meant in a drunken sleep, so the launch had gone back without Thompson coming on deck. Thompson did not intend to come on deck anyway: he would have explained from the launch.

The mate was mystified: but when I showed the maps, he realized that I had got pretty close into the confidence of Thompson; and if I had not intended to go on with the plot, why had I not carried my story straight to the captain?

My procedure was a bit irregular, but effective. He was nervous, uneasy, but convinced. Besides, Swanson hated the captain.

What about Thompson?

I suggested that Thompson had seen fit to sell out his interest in the plan to me; that certain persuasions had been made which appealed to Thompson as irresistible; that whenever I saw a good thing, I naturally wanted to share.

"Is it or is it not a go?" I demanded.

He seemed to think I had the cards pretty well stacked; besides he wanted to even a grudge against the captain, and he believed in the map. A sailor always believes in a treasure-trove map. This one may have been genuine for all that I know.

It was never used. So, all things considered, and perhaps convinced that I would be as firm a leader as Thompson, he declared that it was "a go," and offered his hand.

I ignored the hand and told him that he had better walk a straight line. That made him angry, of course. But I had a better card up my sleeve than he suspected to keep him from trying to do away with me and getting the maps.

"Look here," I said. "I know what is going on inside your head. Here are the maps—three of them. I have copies. I have concealed them. When you find them—the copies—it will be time to slug me over the head and drop me over the side. But not before. Remember, the copies—very accurately made—are all that is left."

With that I struck a match and burned the maps under his nose, while his mouth hung agape.

"There are a half-dozen desperate fellows," I explained lest his slow brain did not fully appreciate the peril in which I had placed him, "enlisted by Thompson on this boat. They expect to go after gold. The ship can't be worked without them. You are their ringleader. If they find out you can't produce the maps, your life won't be worth a salted herring—and you can't produce the maps if anything should happen to me. That's all."

I deliberately turned my back that he might see how little I cared for the boiling anger that reddened his face and heaved his chest. I don't think he noticed that I could watch him very well out of the corners of my eyes in the small mirror that hung on the bulkhead.

As I have said, I am very cautious. When I seem to be taking a chance I am usually playing safe—dealing from the bottom of the deck.

He contained his anger and went out. I supposed he wished my soul on the toasting fork of his satanic majesty's chief cook, but Mr. Swanson had given himself a little lesson in self-control. Perhaps he did not play poker, except in the crude draw-and-bet manner of the win-or-be-broken gambler, and so understood nothing of the refinements of bluff.

THE Chinese steward brought me something for dinner. Withered and wise and rather old he was. And I imperturbably tried further conversation with him, and received no answer. He watched me with a steady scrutiny not at all reassuring—but one can't tell what is reassuring, or ominous, in a Chinaman.

By night my hole had become unbearably wearisome.

The Chinaman visited me again. But I paid no attention to him. But he seemed to me to hesitate, to linger. However, he did nothing, said nothing, and went away.

I waited until it was dark, then went on deck to stretch my legs. I was of the opinion that I had been a little impetuous in coming on board the *Jessie Darling*. The situation was by no means clear, the future not reassuring. It would be wrong to suggest that I was afraid.

When I get into a fix from which my wit and guns can not extricate me, then it is time to die—and as long as I am not shot from behind, my ghost will hold no grudge against the man that sends me across the Border. I was not afraid, but the need for having left San Francisco did not seem so pressing a score of leagues from the Golden Gate on a ship pledged to mutiny.

It was no easy matter to stretch my legs for the moon was bright and dodged in and out among the clouds in a way that annoyed me. I had not yet got what sailormen call my bearings. The moon made little difference in that though. I knew nothing of ships. I did not learn much about the *Jessie Darling* either. I was kept too busy.

As I stood identifying myself as much as possible with a mast shadow, I heard voices, excited voices, aft, then a pattering of feet. A figure scooted by me and shouted down a doorway:

"Turn out an' search the ship. Woman hid—or overboard."

I had been given to understand the ship was short-handed. It seemed overcrowded to me. Voices, harsh laughter and harder jokes, rose in every direction; figures scampered by, some with lanterns; calls rang to and fro. From the poop-deck I could hear the voice of Captain Whibley. Questions and answers and directions—and jokes—all around. And reports. A man came by and flashed a lantern in my face; it was the man who had been detailed by Swanson to let me—or rather Thompson—on board.

I made inquiries.

He said she must have jumped overboard. Sam Tyler had been at the wheel and said he saw her come up and go down amidships. Later he heard a splash—thought he did. Listened, but there was no outcry. Looked, but saw nothing. Supposed maybe it was only a porpoise or something. Must have been her. Ship was searched high and low. No trace. Old Man was furious—the captain, that is.

Was having words with the owner. Cussin' him out. Old Man could cuss some, he could. Seems like she wasn't the owner's daughter, but—— And wasn't that kind of a woman after all. Seemed like she'd been half-drunk or something when she come on board. And sick. Saw what she was into—and jumped.

"Who is the owner?"

"Don't know, sir. Ain't the owner after all. Old Man—I heard him—says, 'You're a —— liar. This boat is owned by John Collins.' They cussed back and forth. Owner a big man with—" the seaman swiped his cheeks to indicate a beard, and added, "black."

I was hot with anger, but I couldn't help anything. I could do nothing. I let women strictly alone because—well, I like them when they are not interfering with me, when they are at a distance, on other men's arms. But I don't like to know of their being mistreated. I am cruel and at times cold-blooded, but I don't want to see anybody cruel to women, children or dogs. I was never put to the test, but I believe that I could without troublesome regret shoot a man who beat a dog.

I know I would if it was a stray that had ever poked its nose into my hand. And dogs are third on the list—though perhaps children are first—of the things it is not wise to abuse if my gun is not empty. In fact, I might be tempted in that case to overcome a strong aversion to using my fists on somebody's face.

I reflected that it was perhaps well that I had been on deck when the search was made. Somebody might have found me in the steward's hole—though I later heard that the steward had made his own report, and reported nothing.

I judged that I had better get out of the way in case somebody might take enough interest in my presence to carry a tale to the captain; though, I understood later, most of the crew knew I had taken Thompson's place.

I went to the hole. It was dark. I struck a match and lighted the lantern. It was a cubbyhole of a place. The bunk occupied almost a half of it. The lantern was smoky and dim, and flickered. I stood for a moment listening at the door. There was nothing to attract attention.

I closed the door and sat down and for a moment, rather fascinated, watched the lantern. It was spluttering away as if embarrassed. I loosed my shoes and placed them carefully by the chair. I am methodical. I removed my collar and tie and reached forward to the little shelf under the lantern. I unbuttoned my vest—and stopped.

There was some kind of a noise—only it wasn't loud enough to be a noise. My muscles became tense and the cold, rigidly icy contraction that always grips my body at the first whisper of alarm, and makes me appear so nerveless and calm, took hold of me.

"YOU can't stay here! Please. I'm here!"

I jerked my head back over my shoulder. A woman's face peered up out of the shadows from under the covers of my bunk.

I turned around in my chair and looked at her. I could not see her face very clearly. I said nothing for a few moments What is there one can say in a situation of the kind? I could not gallantly offer to withdraw myself. I had no place else to go on the ship. I had as good reasons as she for wishing to keep out of sight. So I looked hard and long and my eyes cleared a little and became accustomed to darkness.

She was in that bunk with the covers so ingeniously arranged that it would have taken more than a casual glance to tell that anybody was in it. There was no outline of the body visible. The covers had been drawn and bolstered evenly. Only her face showed and she only just before had drawn the cover from over it. Obviously she could not have made so ingenious arrangement of them herself—even if she had blundered accidentally into the room.

"Who put you there?" I asked.

"The steward."

"That Chinaman?"

"Yes."

There is no telling anything about a Chinaman.

A pause. I looked at her hard. My back was against the light—what there was of it. At last I was convinced. So I said—

"Well, Miss Curwen, how did you come to be on the *Jessie Darling?*"

She flung off the covers and sat upright, agitated, partly frightened:

"Then you *are* that man! I thought so—but—but you are in jail!"

"Let us not get excited," I said soothingly—or tried to say it soothingly. "You're supposed to be overboard and I seem supposed to be in jail. How do you account for it?"

She told me.

I have found that it is usually wisest to show surprize when you don't feel it; to pretend ignorance when you haven't it—and the reverse, too. So I did not seem surprised or appear to have heard anything not already very well known to me.

Miss Helen Curwen was of the slim dark type that are full of passions and wilfulness.

All women like to do things they have no business to do; but not all of them lack discretion, or, as a woman might call it if she is one of the kind that does do those things, the courage. The average woman feels that the world is cheating her: being filled with infinitely more desires, dreams, or whatever her urgent restlessness may be called, than can ever be gratified, she lives under a continual sense of repression—until at such a time as with a kind of volcanic folly she breaks loose.

The breaking loose may take the form of tearing up a dress that she really likes, of throwing a scalding coffee pot at her husband's head, or of throwing herself at some man mother and friends have warned her against. Incidentally, a sure way to make a normal girl interested in, if not in love with, a man—if he has any personality, good looks or suavity at all—is to try to tell her that he is "dangerous," color his reputation with black, call him those names that are sufficient to make him an outcast from society.

Let those who willingly make a study of the sex explain, if they can, why this is so. All, or at least most, of my experiences with women have been against my will. My knowledge of them has usually come from some such inescapable contact as discovering one of them ensconced in my bed, from which—as in this case literally, and in others figuratively, so to speak—they poke their heads to order me out of my own room.

In this case I went promptly, having found out some things of a really surprizing nature.

I went to the galley and roused the steward.

He looked at me steadily, quietly, but said nothing. He made no reply to my demand to know why he had stowed the woman in my bunk; and I am sure that he did not smile, though there were so many wrinkles in his face that I could not be positive about this. He said nothing.

I told him what I wanted and, without suggesting a threatening manner, conveyed to him that an easy way out would be to do it. I do not believe it is ever wise to threaten a Chinaman. Kill him if the situation requires—but threaten, no. His duplicity is so subterranean that he doesn't seem to hear the threat at all, though he is likely to accept it as a challenge to mortal combat and win by poison subsequently delivered with the humblest of smiles.

If he is a Cantonese he is more likely to use a dagger, gently slipping it between your ribs while you look upward to some spot on the ceiling, or to some cloud effect, that his esthetic perception points out. I am not, certainly not, a coward, but I never felt comfortable with strange Chinamen or any women.

He said nothing, but when I had finished he bowed and led the way.

I followed.

He indicated a door, stepped back and hesitated.

I made a gesture of dismissal and added a whispered—

"Thank you."

Gently, as gently as if screwing the lid from an infernal machine, I tried the door. It was not locked.

Cautiously, slowly, soundlessly, I opened it; inch by inch, imperceptibly, I opened it. And when it was wide open I stood in the doorway and waited—waited for the man who sat in a kind of heavy resignation, his face down, his arm thrown back over the chair and a tall, half-emptied glass of whisky in his hand, to look up.

He did.

I LIKE to make dramatic entrances when the opportunity affords. I like it for two reasons: one is that perhaps I am by nature a little theatrical, though certainly not melodramatic—there can't be melodrama anyway, without love of woman; the other and more sensible reason is that such an entrance is almost like a terrific nerve-bomb for the other person.

"My ——!" he muttered, every muscle frozen in fright, his mouth open, his eyes staring in widened horror.

I said nothing.

The light was good, but an oil light, and with the shadows of the passageway behind me perhaps I did take on a rather spectral effect in his crazed brain. The ship, a wooden ship, with long steady rolls veered from side to side, groaning and creaking as if built of dead men's bones.

He swerved abruptly around in his chair, dropping unnoticingly the glass, which fell and splintered, and continued to stare at me.

He passed his hands over his eyes to wipe out the vision, but flesh and blood like mine doesn't vanish so easily.

"You!" he said at last in something between a hiss and prayer.

"Yes, Thrope, you've guessed it," I said, stepping inside and closing the door without taking my eyes from him.

Perhaps he wanted to fight, but he is not greatly to be blamed for not attempting it. I offered no menace, except such menace as he may have read in my face; but if he read anything there his eyes were better than my effort to show no expression, unless an inscrutable lack of feeling and purpose may in itself be called an expression. The tips of my fingers were in the side pockets of my coat; there was no threat in face or manner.

"You, you were—arrested?"

He half asked it, half declared it; that is, he was having difficulty in reconciling the conflicting evidence between his ears and his eyes, between what he seemed to have heard and what he seemed now to see.

"Arrested? What for?" I asked innocently.

"They told me they had you—or would have—or——"

Then suddenly, anxious to charge me with a great crime—

"You killed a man!"

"Oh, did I? Thrope, you seem to have me mixed with some one else."

I was not playing; I was tormenting him. The realities of the world, the things one knows and has heard, on land, take on almost misty distance, a sort of nebulous mirage, if their existence is contradicted at night in mid-ocean, when the ship is devoid of human sounds; particularly when the ship groans and wails—and a woman has just flung herself overboard or, which is just as effective, is thought to have done so.

"You did!" he shouted at me, saying it loudly to convince himself. "You killed Smith. Delaney was crazy because—because—" His voice trailed off indecisively. Then, strengthened by a new idea, he added—"Because it happened at his place!"

I understood. Thrope did not want me to know that Delaney was indignant, furious, because a frame-up had been planted against me—and especially so because it had been pulled off in his place.

No Thrope would not want me to know that. He would not want to believe it himself. Delaney was a power, a political power. He led the underworld to the polls. It was Delaney who knew best how to stuff and steal in a doubtful election, and Thrope was anxious to be governor. He would not want Delaney to be angry, even though he could shake much of the profit out of Delaney's business and graft. Still who could handle votes like Delaney?

If I had known precisely, as I did then where Delaney stood and how angry he was at the frame-up, I might have lain low and remained in San Francisco, not putting much faith in Delaney, but, so to speak, less distrust. But that was all behind me. Thrope and I were together on the high seas.

I looked the cabin over admiringly. It was capacious and beautifully furnished. So the *Jessie Darling* was something of a pleasure yacht.

A bottle of whisky and a piece of paper were on the table at which Thrope sat.

"How did you get here?" he demanded. Then quickly—"Won't you have a drink?"

I read his thoughts—not his thought either, but his intonations and expressions—as plainly as if he had put them into precise words. Between asking how I got there, and the proffer of a glass of whisky, it had occurred to him that if deftly managed I could be arrested on the ship, stowed away and carried back to stand trial.

The main thing, of course, in his mind was to keep me from shooting before help could arrive. I think that he was almost beginning to believe that fortune had played into his hands.

As he turned to pour out whisky for me his eye fell on the piece of folded paper. With a movement intended to be unobstrusive he placed his hand over it and with a very awkward effort at doing nothing suspicious was carrying it to his pocket.

"Something I would be interested in?" I inquired innocently.

"What?" And again and blusteringly, as he rammed it into his pocket—"What!"

Thrope was given to blustering. He seemed to think noise was strength. The world would be full of Samsons were it true.

"Let me share your confidence, Thrope," I said, extending a hand of which the forefinger beckoned slightly.

"Of all the——"

"Impudence. Yes. Let me see that paper!"

"It's personal. I—I—it's personal."

I replied that I didn't care if it were intimate, or what it might be; that I was a very curious individual.

"Have a drink. We might as well make it up," he offered evasively.

I said nothing. I looked at him steadily. In about three seconds he handed me the paper.

"You keep both hands on the table and turn your face the other way," I instructed.

He hesitated, but did as told. I did not want him jumping at me while I was reading. I wouldn't greatly have minded having him do so if I had not already been in certain complications that would have become more embarrassing through having to explain how I happened to shoot millionaire Thrope, candidate for governor—and likely to be elected.

I glanced at the letter, and I came as near to feeling shame as ever I can. But I began and read it. I read it carefully. It was astounding.

"The envelope—the envelope," I said.

"You know to whom it's addressed—you've read it before," he replied half leering at me.

IT WOULD have been useless to deny the charge. I had not read it before. I had not even been able to identify it as that letter—but I had had suspicions. So I asked for the envelope. I really did not care whether he gave it to me, for he had given me its equivalent in his remark.

Perhaps I should have destroyed the letter. I find in looking back over my years, however, that I have seldom done the sensible thing at crucial moments: I have done the safe thing, or tried to. I had some influence over Thrope as long as I kept the letter.

He would have given a foot, leg and all, to get it again. Besides, I rather looked to Mrs. Curwen to feel more relieved if she destroyed it herself—rather than heard, even from me, that it was destroyed. I could, too, understand her hesitation in ever destroying it. A letter of the kind is not the sort that a woman would ever destroy—and then not without committing it to memory.

I put it into my pocket.

"Name your price," said Thrope.

"I prefer to auction it," I told him. "Congressman Bryan is not a rich man, but he has friends. Then, too, a woman may want to bid—and have nothing but tears. Did you ever try to bid against a woman's tears, Thrope? What in —— would you have to offer then?"

Of course, he didn't know of what I was talking. All that got into his head was the idea that I was going to auction the letter.

He became excited and offered—it is useless to repeat his insane sums. Anyway he never expected to pay them, so he could afford to talk in large numbers. He never expected me to get off the ship with the letter. All he feared was that I might destroy it.

"By the way, Thrope, who was the woman that went overboard—to get away from you?"

I am all the time discovering that, though most men are better than the world thinks, yet some of whom I have the lowest opinion are worse even than I could have imagined. I don't like to repeat his exact words, but I believe it necessary: nothing else that the man ever did or said so vividly illuminated the utter meanness and subtlety within him.

Had I not known the facts even I—who was rather a sophisticated and suspicious youngster—would scarcely have doubted the truth, though I might have had contempt for his callousness. He said with a kind of careless regret:

"Her? Oh, a Tommy I picked up on the Coast. She was full of hop and got away from me—jumped the cabin when I wasn't looking."

A silence.

I don't think that I showed that I doubted him. I merely waited. Nothing so much as silence, nothing so much as pause, jangles the nerves of even the hardened guilty.

Then quietly I remarked—

"Helen Curwen never impressed me as a girl like that."

An explosion went off inside of him. For a third of a second he looked as if he was literally blowing up. He jumped and quivered in every muscle.

This governor-to-be was rather implicated in something more than mere scandal—he did not care for mere scandal—if I should tell my story to the public. He could lie, yes. His friends could lie. A mere outcast girl could have been pretty well disposed off by lies; but there were men courageous enough to investigate the facts concerning a reputable daughter, or the daughter of a reputable woman; and there is one thing that constantly reassures my faith in democracies.

Their publics never forgive at the polls the debauchery of young girls, of girls out of homes. The public will smirk and smile and say "Oh well, no men are saints," if a politician is merely a rounder—but let him even be suspected of having invaded the sanctuary of the hearthstone—neither money, lies nor stolen votes can save him.

But, of course, Thrope had the drop on me, figuratively—or thought that he had. Even if I got off the *Jessie Darling* alive, I could be turned over to the police, isolated by them, prevented from being communicated with any but attorneys of Thrope's own choosing, tried before a judge he held to heel and by a jury of the court's own choosing, convicted of Smith's murder, sent to San Quentin or hanged without ever a chance to tell my story; or if I did tell it, to have it reach none but ears of the cabal's own choosing.

Things like that had been done in San Francisco; they have been done in every city at some time or other. Thrope knew all about the effectiveness of such procedure. What he did not fully appreciate was my aversion to putting myself into the hands of justice.

Much of my inveterate dislike of police and courts, and all the machinery of law, much of my often foolhardy efforts to play a lone game, do what I think is right even to lawlessness, may be traced as having had an origin in the experiences and knowledge of what murderous farces were perpetrated around me in my youth.

"Helen Curwen," he lied. "Who is she?"

The girl was supposed to be dead, and I suppose he had thought there were none to identify her, none who recognized her or knew her, until I admitted a certain familiarity with his newest closet-skeleton.

"A friend of mine," I said.

"How did you get on my ship?"

He was angry, but he was doing his best not to show it. Perhaps he was wondering again, as he may have wondered before, just how ready I am to shoot.

A fellow who had led my kind of life, and who has, on occasion, shot, has his reputation magnified and distorted; but such distortion has a wholesome effect on men like Thrope.

"Supposing," I suggested, ignoring his question, "we call in Captain Whibley."

Thrope swore and wanted to know if that—oh, I don't remember how many kinds of —— something or other—man had let me on this private ship, which, so Thrope said, belonged to him.

"Let the captain speak for himself. He didn't impress me as a man who would lie easily."

VI

CAPTAIN WHIBLEY came in. He was big, with a gaunt dark face. A very direct man, the captain.

He asked in so many words who I was, what I was doing on board his ship, and his general attitude was unfavorable.

Thrope fairly bounded to his chance. I was perfectly willing that he should play his hand first.

He told the captain, but not without having edged into a position almost putting the captain nearest my gun—in case I drew—that I was a dirty tin-horn gambler, wanted for murder; and that I had evidently slipped on board the *Jessie Darling* to escape the police; that I was trying to bluff him, Thrope, with a cock-and-bull story about having known the girl—or rather of having pretended that she came from a good home and wasn't a Barbary Coast creature.

Probably the girl was something to me; probably she had helped me on board. Thrope therefore ordered the captain to place me in irons, and as owner of the ship furthermore ordered him to go about and head for San Francisco.

"I have told you once before," said Captain Whibley, slowly, deliberately and with evident aversion for Thrope, "that Collins is the only owner I recognize."

"Collins is only a bookkeeper for me. I'm Thrope, Thomas Thrope."

"I know that," said Whibley, "but if you were King of England I would be the captain of my own ship—at sea. And sail her as my owner directed."

Thrope was set back. He looked it. But his spirit soon rose. Whibley was a firm man and turned his attention to me.

"You are armed?"

I barely nodded.

"Put your gun on the table."

I barely shook my head.

"You heard me say 'Put your gun on that table!' "

Captain Whibley was a strong man, in a way that a man is by his personality powerful. It was only with a psychological effort that I refused.

"No, captain—not yet. I'll break the gun and give it to you at the proper time. But I may want to plug that skunk without having to search around for something to do it with."

Evidently he sympathized with my feeling toward Thrope; and perhaps, too, he recognized that I would not give up the gun.

"What do you mean?" he asked, firmly but inquiringly rather than challengingly.

"Did you see the girl at all?"

"Yes. I saw her. She was very beautiful." He said it simply.

I did not tell the captain all I knew. Helen would not tell him all she had told me. Thrope would not tell all that he knew either. Then I did not know so much as I thought I did—not even after having read the letter which was carefully deposited in my own pocket.

I will try to be brief, for important things happened later on.

The captain went to Helen himself. He questioned her, but not as a sea captain might have been expected to do by those who have rarely met the type of Whibley. He was a strong and lonely man, with a fine sense of justice and an implacable honor.

He returned where I kept vigil over Thrope. And what he told Thrope did my heart good. With dignity, without profanity, with something of religious indignation but no mention of God—for, after all, such manhood as Whibley's is a higher religion than the maundering eye-rolling of the self-consciously holy, who can do nothing decent without calling His attention to their merits—Captain Whibley told the man of millions, the literal owner of that ship, the man powerful and unscrupulous enough to wreck any captain's career, exactly what kind of a dog he was. And Whibley said that as soon as the *Jessie Darling* reached port the full story of the affair would be made public.

"And I'll ruin you!" yelled Thrope.

I touched Thrope on the shoulder. It was something a little more than a touch perhaps, for he wheeled involuntarily and looked into my face.

"You forget," I reminded him, "that my affairs have first claim on your attention!"

It was then that Thrope appealed to Captain Whibley to have me disarmed. Whibley's sense of justice required him to make demands for the gun. I gave one over to him.

"He has another," shouted Thrope.

The captain asked if that was true. He said to hand it over. I refused, politely as possible. The captain, furious at this defiance of authority, reached for the one I had laid on the table; but I threw back the breast of my coat, and with a slight jerk of my wrist he was covered.

I apologized, but I was insistent. In fact I reached out and recovered the other gun.

I was sorry for Captain Whibley. I liked him. I would have liked him less had he not been so determined to disarm me: he had no fear, but turned his back on me and walked from the cabin.

Thrope and I were alone, but we did not talk. That is, he talked but I scarcely listened. He was offering "peace," he was suggesting an "offensive and defensive" alliance. If that story, which Whibley had declared was for the public, should reach its destination—Thrope's political honors would go glimmering, if his political influence would not be entirely destroyed.

Swanson and four men came to the cabin door. Their orders were to disarm and bind me. But I—I merely pointed toward Thrope and said—

"That's the man!"

With rough summary hands they searched him, and found nothing of firearms; they bound him in spite of his raving protests and stowed him on the bunk.

I rummaged through Thrope's effects and found a gun. I removed one of my own, took the shells from the two of them and told Swanson to take them and the report to Whibley.

The men knew very well that they had not been sent to tie up Thrope. But as a chief conspirator and a ringleader of the proposed mutiny which was already due, I was immune from their violence.

THAT is, I was immune just then. That night Sam Tyler gave me the ship news. First, Helen Curwen had been given other quarters than those offered by the steward, and placed under the protection of Captain Whibley.

Tyler had been at the wheel early in the evening when Helen, frightened and desperate, rushed from the companionway and asked where was the steward, the Chinese steward.

"He promised to help me! To hide me! Tell them you saw me jump!" She waved a frantic hand toward the black molten water.

Tyler thought she was fleeing from a dog to a snake by running from a white man to a yellow man. The average Chinaman may be trusted implicitly any place but at a gambling-table and with a woman. But this old silent steward was of a different fiber than most men, white or yellow.

But the important thing that Tyler told me was that the mates, Swanson and the second officer, were spreading the feeling among the ruffians that there was no reason for allowing me to cut on their treasure trove.

That meant a certain danger, but I do not mind admitting that I welcomed it.

My room had been searched and I had been watched. Swanson wanted to find the copies of the maps. Perhaps he thought I had too much sense to keep them on my person, as that would probably be the first place anybody would have the first impulse to look. Perhaps he and his men would have tried to overpower me, to search me, when so ordered by the captain, but Tyler had spread my name and reputation—and Tyler had a vivid imagination. Too, that name and reputation was not unknown to some of them. Moreover, I had in that cabin given them no chance to take me off my guard. A man has to use up about half of his life's blood writing a record of loyalty and true faith before I trust him. I liked Tyler, for instance; I believed in him, but I wouldn't have trusted him very far—though so far as I ever learned he was as good a friend as a man could want.

I play a lone game—go just as far alone as it is possible.

It was well into the morning when I lay down, again in the steward's cubbyhole. I did not undress, for dawn would come in an hour and I wanted to be up and see what was going on, though I had nothing in particular in mind to do.

I did not go to sleep. There was too much movement about; not too much to disturb sleep, but too much to disturb the peace of mind of one suspicious as myself. Feet were shuffling about, voices muttering.

A quiet rap came on my door.

I started to answer, but caught the words back. The approach to the door had been rather stealthy. I would wait. The door opened. Whispers. There was more than one person there. My name was softly called. I did not answer.

I was lying on my left side; my hand touched the handle of the gun that nestled in a skeleton holster on my stomach. I was ready—or thought I was, but a terrific blow fell through the darkness and nearly shattered my right shoulder. I was at once almost smothered beneath the weight of men. I can shoot as well with my left as with my right hand.

This dexterity has been acquired by the left hand after long effort, chiefly because it is the right hand that fellows, looking for an excuse to shoot first, watch. But I could use neither. I was in a bad way and very foolishly struggled. A few years ago a similar surprize was made on me, and I pretended to be unconscious, and presently two of my assailants were themselves unconscious—permanently so. But in that cabin I struggled, foolishly. And I was choked and beaten and gouged, and it seemed as if my clothes were being literally torn from me.

There is nothing, nothing that can be done to me personally that is so infuriating as for people to paw me. I don't want anybody's hands to touch me at any time. And when I am manhandled, my temper swells up like the poisonous throat of a cobra. But my gun had been taken away, and I have no doubt but that the handle of it is what some fellow used to strike me on what he thought was the head, but which was only my already pained shoulder.

I have never been knocked unconscious more than two or three times in my life. That was one of them.

When I came to I found the old withered steward staring down into my face. In his hand he held a tumbler of brandy. Much of it had been poured on my face, and some of it trickled between my teeth, and I felt almost strangled. I don't know how long he had worked with me, but he seemed to think his duties had just begun.

He offered me the rest of the brandy but said nothing.

"Why don't you talk?" I demanded.

He opened his mouth: he was a mute.

At some time or other his tongue had been cut out. In China precautions are taken to keep secrets.

On board the *Jessie Darling* Yang Li and I became friends. Eventually, in years that followed, we were to become brothers. I was to find that for cunning and loyalty that Chinaman was incomparable. Why he had taken a fancy to me then, I do not know. I never did know. Not even Chinese wizardry could foretell that some months later my gun was to clear his trail of enemies. But that does not belong to this story.

I was washed and bandaged. My body was sore, but I was not weak. I was furious, but as my ferocity is never emotional, I said little and displayed patience.

I asked if he knew who had attacked me. He did. I repeated what names I knew, but he nodded at one only. Swanson's.

I was unarmed. He offered me a long knife, refined of edge to a razor's sharpness. I took it, though what I know of handling a knife is about the same as any other man knows—nothing except to grasp the handle and thrust. A knife in the hand of an expert is about the deadliest weapon made.

I ask him if he thought he could steal the gun of mine that had been given the captain the night before. He shook his head and tried to tell me something important.

The mutineers had broken loose; but it was not a mutiny according to the previous plan. Thrope wanted to turn back to San Francisco. He was the owner of the ship. He was rich. His name was known to every man. He was the big boss—and he was to give them protection for putting back, and later, so he promised, to fit them out with a ship of their own for the gold hunt.

The upshot of the thing was that I had been attacked and left for dead, not so much to secure the maps which I was supposed to have, as to secure the letter which Thrope wanted. Events had taken a sudden whirl.

I learned all that later. Yang tried to tell me, but he was not very successful. He could write a bit of English, but I found it hard to read his writing. However, he did make it clear to me that I had been thrown overboard.

Yang, Tyler and another seaman had dumped overboard a form made of a blanket and weighted with bricks out of the galley.

Captain Whibley, badly wounded, was barricaded in his cabin with Helen Curwen. The captain was no coward and he was armed, but he did not stand a chance. Swanson wanted to kill **him** and intended to, especially as Thrope had much the same wish. With Whibley dead and myself overboard, Thrope and the crew could tell any kind of a story and have it believed. Thrope was not the sort of man who would hesitate to take such measures as seemed necessary to silence Helen.

The situation was rather twisted.

Yang painfully wrote out the question—

You kill him?

I found he meant Swanson. I told him that I would take pleasure in relieving Swanson of further earthly troubles at the first opportunity.

But Yang protested. He made me understand that it would be a particular favor to him if he were allowed the pleasure of settling with Mr. Swanson.

"Can you use this thing?" I asked, holding up the long, lean knife.

He snatched it up. His wrist was like a swivel. His arm flashed in and out and up and down. Balanced on his toes, his thin body swayed right and left, ducked, with dazzling rapidity the long blade played with thrust and feint. Then he stopped abruptly and held his arm upraised, poised to throw.

"I guess you had better keep it," I told him. "Bring me a meat cleaver or something I know more about."

He took my half-jesting words at face value. I was furnished with a heavy cleaver.

VII

THE day passed.

The crew, naturally, got drunk.

It was quiet weather, scarcely more than a breath on the ocean—and no reason for staying sober. The sails were drooped, the wheel made fast, and the *Jessie Darling* meandered lazily.

Tyler was drunk, too. I suppose he had had to show good fellowship with the mutineers. But my private opinion is that he did not try very hard to evade drunkenness.

I was patient. When there is no need for hurry, I can be extraordinarily patient. Besides, I had a headache and my body was sore. I waited for night.

Night came.

Yang Li led the way, but he remained behind me when the door opened and once more I stood waiting for Thrope to recognize me.

Thrope and Swanson were drinking together. What agreements and plans they were making I have no way of knowing. They sprang up, Swanson with a yell, as he saw me, half naked and bandaged—a big cleaver in my hand.

I was in earnest, and I meant it when I said—

"Up with your hands."

Why people think it is only a gun that commands the respect of uplifted hands, I do not know. A sober man would have had better sense than Swanson. Thrope, drunk as he was, raised his hands. But Swanson attempted to pull a gun—my gun—from the holster he had fastened on his hip.

He was slow as though untying a knot. I leaned forward to strike—but a streak of steel *z-zz-zzzipped* past my head. The thirsty point of that flexible blade went into Swanson's throat and pierced through his neck; whence the thin wrists of Yang Li got such driving power I do not know.

Swanson went over backward, his hands clawing at the knife. His head, in falling, struck the bulkhead, and he scarcely moved.

Thrope gasped something about it being me—again.

I told him that neither jails nor Davy Jones' locker seemed able to hold me.

"They hang men for aiding a mutiny," I told him. "The Federal Government—not the tenderloin judges."

I knew there was no chance of him ever being hanged, but I might as well give him something to think over when he would be alone. I wanted him to do much thinking, because I had an idea that this affair would have to end in a compromise all the way round.

I trussed Thrope up tightly, painfully tight in fact. I wanted him to have plenty to think of. Something more than mere deviltry.

From that time on I worked quick.

The man who stood a drunken guard over Captain Whibley's door, and no doubt kept awake only by cursing the captain and making remarks unfit for the ears of any woman, especially of her who was on the other side of the door, went down with a hole in his head. He happened to have been one of those who had pounded me, or he might have fared better.

The two mates left, Johnson and a young fellow by the name of Robbins, were alarmed by the shot and came to investigate. Robbins was the fuller of fight—and there was a chance of his surviving if he should be removed directly to a hospital as soon as we reached San Francisco.

Johnson did the discreet thing and surrendered.

With a rope end in one hand and the gun in the other I went on deck. Yang and the cook followed, but they carried water. A form that the rope could bring sufficiently to consciousness to understand what had happened was doused with water.

Three fellows of the drunken group around the capstan were sober enough to fight. No time was wasted in argument. It was stand to attention with a respectful "sir" or get hurt, and the man who threw a marlin-spike at me from the rear served as an object lesson for those sober enough to realize what happened to him.

I found Tyler peacefully snoozing with his head in a bucket; no doubt the bucket had originally served as a pillow. I gave him some attention from the rope end and knocked him down with the butt of the gun when he came up fighting mad.

"Thank Gord it's you! I wouldn't take it off no other feller," he said as he sat on the deck and rubbed his head to see how big the bump was.

I told him that I did not know any more about working a ship than I knew of ping-pong, but if he would give the orders, I would see that they were carried out.

It was a drunken and sullen lot that turned to; but they knew very well that I did not carry a gun as an ornament. When they seemed sober enough to understand that what I was saying was not out of any fear of them, I let it be known that the chances of their being prosecuted for mutiny when they reached port—if they did their work well in the meantime—were rather slim.

I was perhaps taking a good deal on to myself in holding out that hope; but I have been accustomed to taking a good deal on to myself at various times, and I knew very well what I was about on the *Jessie Darling*.

Then—but not until the ship was under discipline—I went to the captain's cabin. I made myself known through the door, and with some hesitancy it was opened by Helen. The captain was rather badly wounded and lay on the bed, covering the door with a gun.

I told him that I had made a mistake in refusing to give up my gun to him; that the mutineers had taken it anyway so I had been reduced to a cleaver, reinforced by a very clever knife-fighter.

WHIBLEY had a broken thigh—I think it was the thigh. Anyway it was something above his knee that overcame even his saturnine determination to stand upright and walk. He did not complain. He did not make a whimper, and though he pushed away Helen when she offered help in the futile solicitious way of a woman touched by the sight of pain, he did it with a strange gentleness. There was no doubt as to how she regarded him.

He asked bluntly if I had killed Thrope.

I told him my story. Helen had already told him hers. I do not think she told him the contents of the letter—but she mentioned it in my presence.

I left the cabin so abruptly that they must have thought I had suddenly gone mad.

High and low I searched for that letter. It contained a secret, a woman's secret—more than a woman's secret, really the destiny of more than one person. It is an awful thing to find the decisive factor of a person's destiny put down on a little bit of paper that may be shifted from hand to hand, and I was determined to get it if possible.

It was not possible. The body of Swanson had been put overboard. The seamen had plundered his pockets—as is not unusual, I believe, among such men as will try a mutiny when one of their number goes down; but there was no getting trace of the letter.

I questioned Thrope, who writhed in pain, in obvious pain. But he denied all knowledge of the letter. For one of the few times in my life, I was deceived by a man's lies—deceived when I looked right at him. But I was deceived, though not so much that I neglected to search him and to search his cabin. However, I believed the letter was gone. There was every reason to think that it had gone, either overboard with Swanson or been cast aside unthinkingly by any one of the crew that chanced to find it.

I had a talk with Thrope, and we came to an understanding.

He was to forget that I shot and killed his imported gunman, Smith; a gambler and dead-shot from Seattle brought down for the express purpose of running me out of San Francisco. As an aid to his forgetfulness he wrote out and signed a statement to the effect that he had often heard Smith say he would kill me. That Thrope had paid Smith to do this did not appear in the statement, but it was a sufficiently strong statement to give me evidence of self-defense.

Of course, its real importance lay in the fact that so long as I had it, Thrope would bring pressure to bear to keep me from being arrested and tried—or at least convicted.

In return, I was to say nothing about his damnable conduct toward Helen Curwen. I was tempted to this less for my own safety than on her own behalf, though I also had Captain Whibley in mind.

The situation was simply this: Helen was not only a fine girl, tinctured with the folly congenital to all girls, but any exploitation of her shame would rebound to Mrs. Curwen and strike again at Congressman Bryan—Thrope's rival for the governorship. So in making the scandal public to injure Thrope's candidacy, that of Bryan's would also be—if not blackened, at least hurt.

The letter which had caused so much concern, and about which all events had pivoted, was from Congressman Bryan to Mrs. Curwen. The letter was not clear, by any means. It had evidently been written for Mrs. Curwen's birthday, and it was a letter of gratitude and love from a son to a mother, who appreciated her great love and sacrifices on behalf of his career; to a mother who had deliberately kept herself in the shadows, secretly, almost furtively, cheering and aiding her boy, willing—the letter said—"to make all of the sacrifices of motherhood, without publicly claiming any of the honors."

I judged, and the author, Congressman Bryan, evidently believed, that he had been born fatherless, and that Mrs. Curwen, rather than let such stigma cling to him had made arrangements for putting him into the world as a foundling.

I did not understand this at all. But it was not my business to understand. I could not see why, since she called herself a Mrs. and acknowledged Helen as a daughter, this brilliant son had not been given a home and name.

But people work out their own lives in their own way, and some of them do not make such mistakes as some of us, catching only furtive and half-revealed glances, think.

For another thing, in our compromise, Thrope agreed to hold no grudge against Whibley. I impressed upon him that this last was an agreement in which I had taken a very strong personal interest. Whibley was the type of man I will go far from my path any time to help. I intimated to Thrope that any interference with Whibley's career would be pressure on my toes, and he knew that I very much resented having my feet stepped on.

I let him up and he sat at the table caressing his bottle of whisky between glasses, feeling not at all ashamed of what he had gone through with and been exposed in, but rather pleased to think an "amiable" understanding had been reached that protected every one.

Without anger, but with evident distaste, I tried to tell Thrope just what manner of man he was and what I thought of him. It is needless to repeat: I simply said in a few words what I have been making clear. But even I did not know, did not suspect the worst about him. Had I done so, I believe I would have killed him.

I know that I would have killed him—tossed him a gun and invited him to try to shoot first. I might have let him fire the first shot. I have done so on rare occasions when I was perfectly willing to go down in return for the satisfaction of being able, honorably, to murder a ruffian.

The man does not live who can shoot so quick or hit me in a spot so deadly that, in such a duel as I mention, I can not—if with nothing more than muscular reflex action—shoot in return; and there are seconds when I can not miss.

I must qualify that slightly: there is one spot which would be fatal to me in such circumstances, but it is not head or heart. It is the wrist, for a broken wrist would cut off the muscular reaction: that is one reason I have broken more gun-men's wrists than probably any other so-called gun-fighter on the Coast. Some people think that I have broken wrists because I hesitated to kill even human vermin.

But to return to Thrope. In the light of subsequent events, I will be bold enough to say that I would even have stooped to shoot him in the back, if in no other way I could have prevented what presently came to pass. That is, of course, if I had had prophetic vision and known what was going to happen.

He kept faith with me regarding the agreements about myself and Captain Whibley. It was something else, something ten times more inconceivably vile; nor did it directly concern Helen Curwen.

Thrope had reasons for keeping his eye on Mrs. Curwen. She was really Mrs. Curwen, and Curwen was less than five years dead.

Helen was her daughter. Thrope had remarked the beauty of Helen. He had insidiously and secretly become acquainted with her, flattered her, turned her head, promised—I don't know what all—and explained in some ingeniously specious way why Mrs. Curwen hated him so much.

Helen Curwen did not know the truth—not until after she had, at Thrope's instigation, stolen the letter which I returned to Mrs. Curwen. She had read it but not understood, scarcely suspected what it really meant until on board the *Jessie Darling*, when Thrope, gleefully, had made it clear.

Helen had been frightfully shocked; the idea that her mother had a "past" cut so deeply that it awakened her to her own folly, and in desperation she had appealed—for lack of any one else to whom she could appeal—to Yang Li; and that wily, wise old Chinaman showed himself a human being.

Being a reader of character, as most if not all Chinamen are, he thrust the girl unannounced under my protection; and that I came near failing in giving her the needed protection was not the fault of Yang Li.

The hardest part of the effort to effect a general compromise and secrecy of what had happened was with Captain Whibley. He swore by all the gods of a seaman that Thrope should be brought to the bar for his wickedness toward Helen.

A simple-hearted old sea captain—he believed in justice and the honor of courts. It was with difficulty I impressed the truth upon him; then he was incredulous. But he yielded to the appeal of protecting Helen, her name, her future. That touched him. He agreed.

So I helped Captain Whibley on to the quarter-deck; and Tyler—as good a man as could be found in the forecastle on any ship for holding a course—took the wheel; Thrope stood by himself at the windward rail, and Helen and I remained by the captain—and we came back through the Golden Gate.

VIII

THE next day the papers had quite a story, and told everything but the truth. My name appeared conspicuously, for this was in a way what is called a "follow-up" story on the Smith affair, in which I had been referred to as the "notorious" *et cetera*. But I was not called the "notorious" *et cetera* in the papers which Thrope influenced upon my return.

No. "New facts had been discovered" which showed that I shot in self-defense. The three witnesses of the gambling game admitted that they lied, that the whole was a frame-up. I was not even to be arrested. The three witnesses had been arrested for perjury before the coroner's jury—such is the way, in graft and politics, henchmen are broken and thrown to the scrap-heap. True enough, they escaped prison, but they were scapegoats.

The dead seamen took the blame of the mutiny on the *Jessie Darling*, and Thrope, Whibley and myself had made a glorious fight against them. Not a word about Yang Li. Oh well, he never cared for publicity, any way.

And how was the name of Helen Curwen cleared? With unsuspected brilliancy. I read it two times and remained incredulous. She was Mrs. Captain Whibley, making her honeymoon voyage with the captain. And so far as anybody ever found out to the contrary—excepting, of course—Mrs. Curwen—that was true. Helen and Captain Whibley were in love and they did marry in a way that interfered not at all with the rather premature announcement.

Thrope, as a friend of the bride and of the captain, had intended to take a little sea-voyage to Honolulu and back before entering upon the last lap of his campaign. He had needed the rest. That was precisely what he had intended, for he felt certain that the letter would be a bombshell in the camp of Bryan, and he, Thrope, could afford the leisure of a sea trip even as a crucial moment of the campaign.

About the only two people I met who did not appear satisfied were Mrs. Curwen and Delaney.

Delaney almost wept. Then he swore loud and fervently. He cursed me for having ever suspected that he would give a friend a double-cross. I took his statement with sufficient salt to make it palatable and said nothing to ease his resentment against Thrope.

Much of that resentment was genuine. It had hurt Delaney's pride—however much or little it had hurt his honor—to think that anybody, even Thrope and the police, would arrange a frame-up against his friend in his own saloon.

He was angry. He asked if I thought I could ever have "got away" with the bluff I worked to get from the saloon if he had not willingly aided? I remarked that I probably could not have got away as easily as I had done if he had not been so agreeable, but that I would have shot—and he knew it.

But at that, I believe Delaney was more sincere than I really wanted to give him credit for. I am suspicious of everybody. Particularly of my friends.

I went to see Mrs. Curwen.

She was very distressed and showed it. Age seemed to have come suddenly to claim his full debt and interest.

"I am desperate—desperate," she said. Again and again she repeated that, remarking that there was no one to whom she could go. "My boy wants to tell the world I am his mother," she said, after I had let her know the vicissitudes of the ill-fated letter, "but it can't be." She said it with an intonation of finality. There was something more than a woman's sacrificial stubbornness in her voice.

"He doesn't know—even yet—all. And I can't tell him, ever!" she said.

I did not understand that remark. She did not appear to expect me to understand. I made no comment.

To make one sentence of it: Thrope, she said, was an enemy from of old; she had known him for many, many years, and for most of them had been afraid of him.

"I am terribly afraid of him," she repeated, looking at me in such a way that I could not very well help saying—

"Any time, just send word to me through Delaney of the Hoop-la Saloon."

She told me more than it is necessary to repeat of how she had watched over the boy, keeping her secret from every one but him. On his twelfth birthday she had ventured to tell him the truth.

"Or as much of it as my shame would let me. I said his father was dead and—" she broke off chokingly.

When I had first returned the letter to her she had learned that Thrope was after it and she determined to destroy it. But she could not. It meant too much. Mr. Ellis, who had been sent to San Francisco as soon as Bryan had learned of the letter being lost, and who, guided by gossip along the Barbary Coast, had searched me out, then discovered from Mrs. Curwen that it had already been returned; and he had returned to me and generously paid the money he had been given to offer as a reward.

Mrs. Curwen, afraid of Thrope, had given up the house and moved into an apartment. That was why I could not locate her. At last, determined to ease her mind for once and all, she had decided to burn the letter. Then she had found that it was gone and a blank piece of paper had been substituted. As she had read and reread it frequently, she knew the substitution had been but recently made.

She never suspected Helen, but was thoroughly frightened. She did not know that Helen and Thrope had even met. Mrs. Curwen had spent a terrible week—which had its anguish greatly increased by the disappearance of Helen.

All of her life, fear and tragedy had stalked beside her; and now she was tensely wrought up. The capacity for passive suffering had been exhausted.

"Thrope will try to use that letter against my boy," she cried, "and if he does— Oh, if he does——"

She broke off.

For a moment the tigress that is in every woman appeared. Her hands became claws and her face changed to a harpy's. Stir any woman—any man—to the ultimate depths of desperation, and there will appear the claws and gleaming teeth.

Anthropologists estimate that we were beasts of the clawing hands and teeth about four times as long as we of the so-called human race have been men and women. A moment of ferocious tenseness—and she was exhausted and fell back weakly into her chair. She muttered rather than said—

"Oh, if the people only knew—but I can't tell—I won't tell! I would die first!"

She said nothing more and I did not question her, but I was more moved than I shall try to express.

I haven't repeated and do not intend to repeat what she told me of how she suffered and worked and planned to help that boy, now the fine congressman; of how her heart would almost leap from her breast at mention of his name, and of the secret pride she felt when people praised him as fearless and brilliant; of how she hung in the agony of suspense at every election for fear he might not win—and now to think his career might be crumbled in one cowardly, shameful blow against which she could oppose no buckler!

I tried to assure her that her fear was largely anxiety; but she assured me that there was no infamy to which Thrope would not plunge with pleasure; that I had no conception of what he would do—that I had no conception of what he could do, and she would not tell me, would not tell any one! Never! Never!

I thought that I could understand her hysteria, but I was deeply touched by her sorrow, by her tragic situation. I again offered to do whatever I could at any time.

IX

I SHALL say nothing of the political campaign, beyond the fact that it was unusually hot and bitter; and that Bryan spoke night after night and seemed to have aroused the State as it had never been aroused before against the old gang; and the old gang viciously distorted his record and attacked him.

For some weeks my life went on about the same as usual. I read the papers and played cards and people let me alone. I went every time Bryan spoke in San Francisco, and I liked him. He was a fighter—inspired by something more than the hankering for a governorship.

I looked him over carefully and felt that there was a man who could not be broken and would not bend; a man whose word and honor could be trusted. And though I knew very well that he would keep that word and run the gambling-joints out of the State—I told whoever took the trouble to inquire that I should vote for him.

"You're crazy," said Delaney.

"I'd rather have him for an enemy than Thrope for a friend."

"He'll ruin our business," said Delaney.

"Thrope's ruined our conscience," I said.

And Delaney blinked once or twice and opened his mouth like a fish; and at last he said incredulously that he believed I meant it!

"How far would you trust Thrope?" I asked.

"No farther 'an a .45 'll carry."

"There you are. Bryan keeps his word. I've never broken mine. I shall vote for him. Australia's wide open—I'll go there and play cards."

The conversation was longer but as trivial and only confirmed Delaney in the opinion that I was crazy.

It was about ten days before election that Delaney gleefully told me my friend Bryan was a goner; Thrope had an ace up his sleeve and it was going to be published in his paper the next Sunday—"a letter of some kind."

I was a little jumpy every time "letter" was mentioned.

I wanted to find out definitely; but there was no way I knew of that I could. Thrope was out of the city—or was supposed to be. Bryan was also out of the city. I found other people living in Mrs. Curwen's house. She had sold it.

They did not know where she was. Helen had gone to sea with her husband, Captain Whibley—a real honeymoon this time. I went to Bryan's headquarters, but there was nobody around there I would trust, so I came away. Then I went in search of a newspaper man whom I knew and rather liked.

He was an alert young fellow, full of ideas and rather flattered by being the friend of so notorious a figure as myself; besides he had once been fired from—I shall call it the *Tribune*, as it has changed hands since then and is now a decent paper—the *Tribune*, Thrope's paper.

"Supposing," I said to him, for I knew no more about the workings of a newspaper than the average editor does of poker, however much editors play at it. "Supposing the editor of the *Tribune* had something I wanted. That he intended to put it in the paper—a picture, or a letter? How would I go about getting it?"

"Best way 'd be to blow up the building," he said. As I did not seem to appreciate the joke, he added soberly:

"A picture—maybe they've taken a copy and the original is stowed some place. Letter—anything like that, they photograph it. Nobody may know where the original is."

"How can I get in to the editor?"

I had heard that editors were as unapproachable as kings and things.

"Tell 'em you got a story—tell 'em who you are, and that you've got a story you won't turn loose to nobody but Old Man Blake himself."

I did. At eleven-thirty Friday night I was shown into the anteroom of Mr. Blake's private office and told to wait. I was left alone. I noticed that the anteroom door locked from the inside, though the lock did not appear ever to have been used.

I listened at the door marked Private. Blake was not alone.

I gently tried the door. It was unlocked. I crossed the room and locked the anteroom door, then stepped through the one marked Private, saying as I came in—

"Just the very man I wanted to see, Mr. Thrope!"

Thrope started to roar, but perceived that it was I, and his glance apprehensively searched out my hands. He seemed to think that I went around ready to shoot.

Blake was a fat man, bald-headed, with protruding side-whiskers; and he drew in his breath with toad-like pomposity to order me out of the room, but he looked at Thrope and asked—

"Do you know him?"

"You do, too," said Thrope. "It's——" he mentioned my name with a peculiar falling inflection, muttering it as though unwilling to speak it aloud.

I suppose that it was unpleasant on his tongue.

"Well, what'd you want?" said Thrope, trying not to be more unpleasant than he could help, for he knew by this time by something more than hearsay that I would —well, he remembered Smith, Swanson and certain other men on board the *Jessie Darling*. And though he wished me well out of his sight he did not make that wish too apparent.

"Bryan's letter," I told him briefly.

"Trapped, by ——!" said Blake apoplectically, and his hand reached toward a button at the end of his desk.

"Supposing you put your hands in your pockets, Mr. Blake!" I told him pointedly.

His puffed eyes bulged a little; but he followed my suggestion, ramming his hands into his pockets as if defying me instead of complying with my gentle request.

"She sent you here!" Thrope accused. "—— her!"

"Naturally," I said. "Why else do you suppose I happened to come—at this psychological moment?" I asked, not knowing what it was all about.

But I never hesitate to take any advantage that Fortune hands to me, and I have found Fortune a most generous mistress.

"The letter isn't here," said Blake, advancing some information in a manner that impressed me as too considerate.

"No?" I asked.

"No!" said Thrope.

"No!" echoed Blake emphatically.

"Then why do you lie to each other?" I demanded, stressing the words just as much as I thought was needed to make them uncomfortable.

Both men gave a slight start. I doubt if they did realize what I meant, but they did not feel comfortable.

"I had my ear to the keyhole there for some moments—before I came in. The letter is in that safe, or you are a liar!" I addressed the last to Blake.

He started to bound up, with something like—

"No man can call me that!"

But he sat down and finished his sentence in an inarticulate mumble.

I had made no move, no gesture. But he understood.

"You talk too —— much!" Thrope exclaimed accusingly at the editor.

Since I had heard Thrope ask him if the letter was in the safe, and Blake had only answered, I felt the accusation a little unjust; but I made no comment.

"I don't suppose she'll telephone now," said Thrope, looking at me inquiringly.

"Oh, my presence here will make no difference. She will telephone, I suppose." I assured him.

"It's time then," said Blake staring up at the clock.

"But the letter—first. Now," I said.

THEN I learned something of what it was all about. Mrs. Curwen was trying to get Thrope to give up the letter. He would not meet her, but he had made a telephone appointment. She had assured him that she could give reasons why he should return the letter to her, why he would be glad to return it.

Thrope was naturally incredulous. It seemed that he and Mrs. Curwen had known each other for many many years; and Thrope—though he did not say this—appeared to have taken a sort of pleasure all those years in keeping her afraid of him. He knew that she was afraid of him, and he had enjoyed the bullying pleasure of keeping her frightened.

By chance I had stepped into the game and demanded cards at the crucial moment. Let me pause a minute to remark that nobody will be likely to convince me that I am religious; and yet anybody will have a hard time convincing me that there is not something—something sentient in Destiny that rules with an inexorable hand this thing we carelessly call "chance" and "luck."

In my own life—and I believe other men can look into their own lives and find the same—it has happened too often that by so-called chance I have made such entrances, and by chance played such part in the lives of men and women, as if my rôle were directed by a great and watchful dramatist.

This thing we call "luck" and "chance" is too pertinent, too advertent, too much the fabric of design, to be merely accidental. I know many lips will trace skeptical smiles upon themselves at such a statement; but let the more thoughtful reflect that every situation begins and develops from something—some meeting, word, introduction, from something, that can properly be called chance.

This is so true that it can not be denied once any one recognizes the viewpoint from which I make the statement. And I never, before or since, felt myself so much the pawn of some inscrutable chance as in the affair of Thrope and Mrs. Curwen.

The whole thing moved to its inexorable end, its inexorable and tragic end, too inevitably to have been mere happenchance. But, of course, I am telling a story —not offering a contribution to metaphysics.

Mrs. Curwen telephoned.

Naturally, with all the honesty of her nature, she denied that I had had anything to do with the plan to get in touch with Thrope; she denied that I had found from her where he could be located at that hour.

And I fancy that she was surprized at the sudden change in Thrope's manner over the telephone; for when he had said some fifty words in his characteristic manner—or at least the manner that he seemed to employ toward women whom he did not care to flatter—he abruptly became polite and almost gracious. The suggestion that he do so, of course, came from me, and came in such a way that he did not care to refuse.

I could make nothing of the conversation over the phone because I heard very little of it after Thrope quieted down. Mrs. Curwen seemed to be doing all of the talking; and it seemed to me that Thrope was strangely impressed and by something more than I had said.

I noticed him biting his knuckles as if to restrain his emotion. But, I reflected, that might have been from suppressed anger. But his whole manner disclosed a nervousness that was remarkable. He glanced almost furtively from me to Blake as though fearful that we, too, were hearing.

The conversation lasted for some minutes. It ended with Thrope agreeing to make an appointment to meet her alone in his own office the following night.

I found out afterward—from her—that she had summoned one of the specters that haunted her past and set it on to Thrope. Mrs. Curwen in her younger days had been reckless, rash, even more so than Helen. She too had loved Thrope. He had murdered a man before her eyes. She had had no part in the crime but the love she then bore him, which constrained her to secrecy.

Always she had been afraid that the story would come out, and that Thrope would—as he threatened—make it appear that she had killed the man herself. At last, desperate, she had reversed the situation and declared that whatever the shame might be to her, she was going to force the story out and blast him, though it blasted her too! As a coward always is when the victim turns, Thrope was frightened.

But by the following night Thrope had summoned his ingenuity. He had made deductions and arrived at what seemed satisfactory conclusions for bullying the woman further: let her force the story out into the public. He ended by hoping she would do it, for he—he could make political capital of it. Besides, what is money for if not to prove alibis, even in a murder of twenty years ago!

I am getting a little ahead of my narrative. The letter was yet to be disposed of. That, however, did not take long.

When the telephone conversation was over I merely repeated that I wanted it, and at once; and Blake unlocked the little office safe and gave it to me. Then I struck a match and burned it and ground the ashes into the carpet with my heel.

I faced them and said:

"Something unpleasant will happen to somebody if the attempt is made to arrest me on the charge of robbing a girl, or fleecing a miner, or violating the ordinance about obstructing the traffic, or on any other of the trumped-up charges which you fellows usually make to get a man into jail. Think up something original, very original, if you want me to pay attention to it—then send a detective you don't care much about to serve it!"

I was young, and of course talked a little more than I would under similar circumstances now. About the last thing that a young man learns is that no words, or at most two or three, will usually be more impressive than a speech—such as playwrights like to give heroes.

But what I did say was brief enough to carry weight with Thrope and Blake—largely because they knew that Spike Delaney had, so to speak, put his sheltering wing over me and would, as the phrase goes, "start something" if another frame-up was pulled on me.

X

THIS ends my story. I will get to the concluding facts briefly.

The following morning, through Delaney, Mrs. Curwen anxiously sent word for me to meet her.

It was to be a busy day for Thrope and he did not know how much, if at all, before midnight he could get to the office and keep his appointment with her. Mrs. Curwen was exceedingly nervous, but she said that she was not afraid. However, she wanted me to conceal myself in the office as a witness of what passed between them.

"I am afraid," she said tremulously, "I shall have to tell him something that no one on earth knows but myself—and—and I want you to know. I trust you—after what you did about that letter, and for Helen. And after what Mr. Ellis says."

Ellis, Edwin Ellis, I found—he was the man who had come to me offering ten thousand for the recovery of the letter and had later forced payment of that sum upon me—was a detective from Washington who had been hurried to San Francisco as soon as Mrs. Curwen had reported the loss of the letter. The first time we met he had learned that I had it, but not that I had returned it. As soon as he discovered that I had returned the letter he generously gave me the reward that Bryan had been willing to pay.

The elevator ran until ten o'clock on Saturday nights in the Thrope Building. Mrs. Curwen went up at ten, and I followed a minute later. She suggested that it might be best for us not to be seen together.

She opened the door direct from the hall into Thrope's private office and left it unlocked for me—or rather held it ajar for me, and held her finger warningly to her lip.

"Somebody's in there—I heard them move!" she whispered soundlessly, indicating a door that opened from the private office into another room.

Nobody could very well have proper business in there, since no light was burning—or at least none showed under the door.

I tiptoed across and listened, but I heard nothing.

Perhaps Mrs. Curwen had been mistaken, but the chances always were that Thrope could not be trusted; and he might have somebody there—and that somebody's presence might be for any purpose.

I looked at Mrs. Curwen. She wore a long coat and a bonnet hat. The thick veil that had covered her face was lifted so I could see how brightly her eyes were burning, eyes that seemed much sunken since we last met; and how tightly thin her lips were pressed. She looked more like a figure of stately allegory than a woman come to plead with a man, for she stood erect and the long lines of the coat that fell below her knees gave her form a certain dignity such as one seldom sees.

She would not flinch. I could tell that much.

I spoke to her with lip movement rather than with sound—noiselessly. I told her to pretend to telephone that she would not wait, and was leaving; then to step into the hall and shut the door after her.

She did so.

I stood beside the door opening into the next room and waited. For some seconds all was quiet, then I detected the shuffling of feet. Silence again. The party on the other side was listening.

The lock turned in the door. It moved cautiously, then slowly opened so that a little furtive middle-aged man blinked in the light. He was near-sighted and wore heavy glasses; and, too, he had come from a dark room into a lighted one.

Mine is not a gentle hand. My fingers fastened on the back of his neck. The other hand went over his mouth and silenced the cry that he started to make. He was a weak little office-bred clerk, frightened and not even cunning. By occupation he was court reporter, very good at shorthand he said.

Some woman was coming to blackmail Mr. Thrope and he had been posted there to take a stenographic record, he said; and at once admitted that he had lied. He tried another evasion or two. then admitted that he was Thrope's stenographer. He had been with Thrope for years. He knew that a woman was coming to meet Thrope and he had been posted to take it down.

A little listening-hole had been made in the wall. I might almost say that it had been built in. He showed it to me and admitted that it had been used on many occasions. A small electric light, partly boxed in, illuminated a small shelf upon which he could rest his pad and make his notes with ease.

I took a towel, fashioned a gag, and locked Mr. Stenographer in the lavatory. I took his keys from him and investigated the various doors. I thought it might be well for me to have some way out in case I wanted to leave without interrupting the interview between Thrope and Mrs. Curwen. Thrope's offices—he was at the head of a big lumber company—occupied very nearly half of the space on one side of the building; and I found that I could open a door far down the corridor and near the stairs—almost a third of a block away from Thrope's private office.

Mrs. Curwen and I said a few words, but she was in no mood to talk; so, not knowing what minute Thrope might come, I went inside to the peep-hole and waited. I could watch her, and did. She sat very quiet, motionless, except that her breathing was deep and hurried as if she were making a severe effort to control herself.

THROPE came, big, hearty and sure of himself.

"Well, Mary," he said with kind of sardonic amusement, "we meet again."

"Yes, again."

"So you're going to try to rake up the past, eh? You know what 'll happen. I was a fool to ever try to protect you for that murder, Mary. But then, you see, I didn't really know you killed him and I loved you!"

Mrs. Curwen was amazed. She did not realize that Thrope was talking for the benefit of the stenographic report—that was not being taken.

"And so this Bryan is your brat, eh? And you want him elected. Trying to bluff me out of the running. I am too weak with women—they twist me around their fingers. You know. You used to do it. But you can't bully me! No. What do you want?"

She told him, speaking in a low, strained voice, that she wanted him to withdraw from the campaign, that she wanted him to give up the fight against Bryan.

"You will regret it—oh, how you will regret it, if you don't!"

It was more of a prophecy than a threat. She was not angry. She was pleading.

"He is your ——!" Thrope used the ugly word generally applied to the children of unfortunate mothers.

"And yours!" she cried.

I doubt if she had intended to say as much, to tell him that at all; but the retort was irresistibly drawn from her.

They stared at each other, and stared and stared, and made no move.

"Is that true?" he asked in a low, almost inaudible voice.

"Yes!" And quickly, pleadingly she sketched the history of how she had helped and guarded the boy, and never told him who his father was, and made him feel that it was better that he should not let the world know who his mother was, because she wanted him to rise—to go up and on, and be honest, to be noble.

"And he couldn't do it," she hissed, "if he knew such blood as yours was in his veins."

Thrope believed her. He knew she spoke the truth. But he was a politician, and there was less manhood in him than there is in the jackal, which will fight for its own.

"You lie, woman. You lie! You can't prove that I——"

"No," she cut in, "because I had a good father and mother. And met you secretly because they disliked you. I can prove nothing! I do not need proof. You know it. Oh, give up this campaign—let him win. Don't drag up my shame to light. I don't care. But it is for him. For my boy—your son! That letter—that horrible unlucky letter! How proud I was when he sent it to me. You might have made the letter public because you will do anything to get your end. But now—now you must not fight him! I didn't intend to tell you. It was my secret, mine and God's!"

"Leave God out of it, when you lie! You can't bluff me like that. He's yours—— and you're trying to drag me into it! This is the craftiest political deal I've ever run up against. I suppose he put you up to come! Now look here, old girl, I'll show you what happens when anybody tries to put something over on me! Every word of this interview goes in the paper tomorrow morning—in the *Tribune!* There's a stenographer in there has taken down every word. I'm not afraid. Let the public judge between us. My son,——! Your ——!"

The fold of Mrs. Curwen's cloak was pushed aside. A large ivory handled, nickel-plated revolver came into view, and as it came into view, she shot.

Thrope fell dead. A bullet in his brain.

WHEN people came a-pounding at the door and flung it open, for it was not locked, I turned hastily back from that door that led inside and, without seeming to have a purpose in doing so, barred the way. So Mrs. Curwen escaped alone. I had taken the gun from her hand as she stood motionless, looking down upon the man whom she had at last paid with the full measure of vengenace.

The shot that killed Thrope seemed, too, to have numbed her realization of what she had done. It was not until I took the gun from her hand and pushed her inside the room from which I had just come that she seemed to understand that there was a chance to escape. She had not appeared to think of trying to, or of caring to escape. I am inclined to believe that she had come determined to kill him anyway. Certainly she knew that she had nothing to fear from the stenographic report of the conversation upon which Thrope had depended.

It was not gallantry or even forethought on my part that caused me to turn and take the blame. I did it instinctively. But, having done so, I could not refuse to carry the rôle out. I would make no statement to any one. The evidence was incontrovertible. I could not escape conviction.

Let me review the situation briefly. If Mrs. Curwen kept silent I could not escape hanging. If she confided with Bryan and he, as the governor, declined to injure his career by pardoning me, I could not escape. True, I could have stirred up a sensation, but I could have proved nothing. Blake of the *Tribune* offered to use his influence—preposterous! he had none and I told him so—in getting me a pardon if I would tell the truth.

He suspected that Mrs. Curwen was implicated. He also thought of using the copy and photograph of one page of the letter, but was afraid to go through with it. But Bryan, who was readily elected, was in almost as bad a fix as I: if he pardoned me, people would say that he had connived with me to put his personal and political enemy out of the way; if he did not pardon me—well, he had his own conscience to live with.

The truth could not come out unless his own mother was thrown into the prisoner's dock and the hideous and sordid story exhausted to its last detail.

Any way out somebody's life would be ruined—some innocent person's life, for I refuse to consider Mrs. Curwen guilty, though I think she had been touched by madness. A jury might have acquitted her, but Thrope's friends would have been powerful; besides, her son's career would have been ruined—and that was more to her than life.

I felt sorry for her, and for the young governor; but not sorry enough to be hanged, though I showed some patience in the trial and conviction.

In fact, I had to be convicted before the governor could help me! I was convicted and was sentenced by a judge of Thrope's own choosing to be hanged.

That judge put much feeling into the reading of the death sentence. He had shown all through the trial plenty of gratitude to the memory of the man who had raised him on stuffed ballots to the bench.

I have never had much use for circumstantial evidence or belief in capital punishment since those trying days.

What happened? In some mysterious manner I got hold of a revolver and held up the turnkey one morning between midnight and dawn. My good friend Delaney had paid that turnkey the sum of ten thousand dollars to give me this revolver and to be held up; and of course Delaney had no objections to paying out such a large sum because it was the ten thousand dollars that Bryan, through Ellis, had given me as a reward for returning that letter—of malignant influence.

By an odd coincidence that nobody seemed to remark, I escaped on the night before Captain Whibley—who had left the Thrope Lumber Company's service—sailed on a windjammer for Sydney.

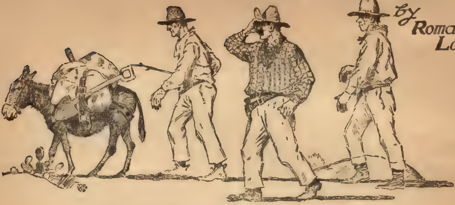
But four people knew: Delaney, Sam Tyler, who met me at the wharf and took me to Whibley's ship, and Whibley and Helen. Mrs. Curwen had told her. So the bread I had cast upon the water came back to me, and the governor had not connived at my escape, nor was he embarrassed by having to pardon me. I believe that he would have done so—still, it is a terrible thing to make a politician, even an honest one, choose between his conscience and his career.

* * *

SICKNESS, death, cut Governor Bryan off as he was finishing his second term. Shortly afterward Mrs. Curwen died. With the death of her son she had nothing more to live for. The confession that cleared my name was found under her pillow.

THREE WISE MEN

By Romaine H. Lowdermilk



Author of "The Spirit of His Youth," "Too Much Caution," etc.

THREE large, evil men lolled in sultry shade of "Spade" Gowdy's Nugget Saloon, watching one small, righteous man at work in the sun. It was far too hot to work, but Obadiah Higgins toiled painstakingly with the resiny pine planking of the curb over the newly dug saloon well. The three onlookers had struck a bargain with Obadiah and were only awaiting the completion of the task to enjoy seeing Obadiah take his strange payment.

The wait was not irksome, for Obadiah was a deft workman; besides, he had been working on that well-curb since early morning, and it was now nearly noon. Obadiah drove the last nail as carefully and surely as he had the first. Skillfully he planed down imperceptible rough spots; carefully he hung the new pulley-wheel in the exact center of the frame. In fact, it was a well-curb fit to grace any well in the little Eastern hamlet that had been his home town, instead of being set over a saloon well, a mere unpainted pine necessity in a squalid little gulch town like El Oro.

Obadiah paused a moment to inspect his handiwork. Obadiah was scrawny. Yes, Obadiah Higgins was scrawny. He couldn't have tipped the scales over one hundred and twenty at his prime—if he ever had any prime—and now he was well past his prime—fifty at least, gray, with a smoothly shaven face pleasantly furrowed. Cheery little wrinkles played about the corners of his eyes and humorous, up-turned ones were etched where his lips met in their not too firm line in front of his toothless gums. His nose was thin, too, like the rest of him, and ended in a little hook. His eyes—his wistful gray eyes that had always trusted everybody and just couldn't get over their puppylike faith in the goodness of everything—looked out hungrily on a world they seemed never to understand.

Obadiah had been cheated. He—he was —well, possibly there was something lacking. Forty years he had endured the raillery of thoughtless citizens of the little home town back East—forty years of satirical gibes that alone would have been enough to shift the balance of a stronger mind than his. Finally one of the younger generation openly called him a —— fool. Obadiah, with a childlike faith that he could go "out West" and make good, summoned all his courage and bid the town good-by.

Ten years Obadiah pitted his frail strength against the stern odds of the gold country. Finally he drifted to El Oro. He could have been a skilled worker in fine woods elsewhere, but in El Oro he was a carpenter. While it was pitifully apparent he had been a failure all along, he still harbored eternal hope that he could, before the end, go back home and show them that he had "made good."

EVIDENTLY Obadiah decided the job was satisfactorily done, for he put away his tools and proceeded to reap his reward. Taking from his tool-kit a tomato can half filled with a black fluid composed of lampblack and a dash of the camp's meager supply of kerosene, Obadiah knelt stifly before the curb and stirred expectantly with the caked brush that was mostly handle. Then, with infinite care, he printed on the glaring hot planks a big, boyish looking G. Repeating the process, he turned out an O, then a D.

"G-o-d—good," stated "Spade" Gowdy to his two companions in the shade.

"Good nothin'," corrected Jim Moore scornfully; "can't you read, Spade? That word ain't 'good'—hit's 'Gawd!'"

"Ho, him, eh? You mean our ol' Uncle Billy in heaven we ain't never seen and won't till we croak an' he tells us to go to ——? Him?"

"Boys!" Obadiah twisted around, balancing with a hand to the curb, and addressed the three. "Oh, I wish you wouldn't talk that way. It's—it's wicked, boys. Besides, it's not giving the Creator a square deal. I just wish you'd wait a minute till I get this printed. It'll be something real nice, boys."

"Well, turn around an' git a move on, thin," suggested Danny Carver. "Go ahead wid yer printin', and mind ye now, git off a new one. I'm fed up wid readin' the old ones on ivry rock an' plank in the counthry. Go on, print us a new one."

"Naw," objected Spade Gowdy. "Let him quit right there. He's got 'nough. That one word tells the tale. Leave her stand as it is."

"Just put 'ain't hit hot' after that there word," broke in Moore. "That'll be a reg'lar he-platitude. Gord, ain't hit hot! I'm like Carver, I'm getting tired of 'Repent,' 'Seek ye the Lord,' and so forth, staring me in the face from every stone in Oro gulch. Give us a lively one, 'Parson.'"

"Nope," Spade Gowdy insisted stubbornly, "it's my well-curb and it's my say what goeth thereupon. I say——"

"You're wrong there, Spade," argued Moore. "You agreed to let Obadiah print any dad-gum thing on it he wanted to, long 's he'd build it for you. Leave it to him, but for gosh sake let him pull off a new one."

With much stirring and many gyrations of his tongue against his cheek, Obadiah had placidly gone ahead, unmindful of the argument, and evolved the righteous sentence:

God is not Mocked.

"'Gawd is not m-o-c-k-e-d.' Mock-ed. Moc-ke-d." Spade Gowdy struggled with the letters. "Neck-ed—hah, neckkid! Ol' parson out there says Uncle Billy Gawd ain't neckkid. How's he know? Heh, 'Parson,' how'd you know He ain't neckkid? Tell us that!"

Obadiah arose.

"Boys, I don't want to force the Word on you too much, but hark ye!" Obadiah's meek tones suddenly became clarion clear as he quoted: "'Unto him that blasphemeth against the Holy Ghost it shall not be forgiven.' Luke twelve, ten."

Stepping humbly to another side of the curb, he knelt, stirred and printed.

"Wow," mocked Spade, "ol' 'Postle Paul sure turned on the gas that time. Won't be forgiven, eh? What's the idee to beller so about that?"

"Say, Spade," Carver began earnestly, "faith I do wish ye'd a leetle more eddication; then ye wouldn't be foriver danglin' the sword of Damocles over us this way. If ye don't belave there's a Creator, keep shut about it like I do."

"Well, we-l-l!" gasped Spade in feigned astonishment. "Why, hello, St. Peter. When'd you quit tendin' bar in the Nugget Saloon and begin distributin' tracts. Say, you red-headed Irishman, if you want to begin preachin', get a paint-pot an' go to it—but come first inside an' paint a sign 'Bartender Wanted' and let me pay you off."

Carver only swore.

Presently, craning, the three shifted their positions in the shade to see what Obadiah had produced.

Whatsoever a man soweth,

Moore read the words quizzically.

"'Whatsoever a man seweth?" repeated Spade wonderingly.

They waited in silence until Obadiah had finished the third side before they ventured out into the dazzling Arizona sun to view the result.

That shall he also reap.

Spade stared at Moore in blank unbelief. He started to speak but caught his word half uttered and doubled in raucous laughter.

"Neckkid," he gasped, "seweth—shall also rip. Haw, parson, you gotteth off a new one on me. Come inside an' have a drink on the house."

Obadiah waved his brush in lieu of reply. On the fourth side he was laboriously printing his final shot.

Strong Drink is Raging. Whosoever is deceived thereby is Not Wise.

Obadiah, feeling well paid for his morning's labor, hummed as he neatly repacked his kit.

" 'Strong drink is r-a-g-i-n-g.' " Spade was endeavoring to find out what Obadiah had said about strong drink on his well-curb. Eventually he decided the word was "rag-ging." He announced: "Strong drink is ragging. What the——"

"You bet it is," Moore affirmed. "That hooch you and Carver peddle in your honkeytonk sure puts raggin' into a feller's feet and the rags on his back. Makes him raggy, ragged and rank. I've been loafing around this joint a week when I'd ought to been out to my diggins gatherin' in a pooch-full of dust instead of spendin' hit. Come on in, I'll take a last drink with you. I'm dry, myself."

◆

"W-E-E-LL look-e-e there!"

Carver was gazing intently at something that had appeared out of the blistering hills at the upper end of the gulch. A half-human object that progressed in weird humpings and stumblings among the hot, rounded boulders of the creek bed.

"Well, I'd say," mumbled Spade, leering half-heartedly at the bobbing figure. "Looks like a whinny-diddle."

"Something coming to git yuh, Spade," Moore jeered. "By Judas, the prophet's right. Strong drink is raging—I see it myself. I'm goin' to take a drink of water."

"It's a man, thot's what it is," Carver stated. Together they peered through the shimmering heat waves at the humping object. Obadiah set down his tool-kit and stared with the others.

"Yuh see hit too, Parson?" queried Moore.

"I—yes, my eyes—" Obadiah brushed the back of his hand across his face and shaded his eyes with both hands. "Yes—and I think it's a man. Possibly some prospector out of water. We'd better go up and do what we can to help him out."

"What! Up there in that sun?" grumbled Spade. "You're crazier 'n I am, an' I'm drunk an' you're not. Go nothin'. Send for Gawd. Let him do it. That's his trade, savin' fellers."

"Aw, come on, Spade." Moore slapped Gowdy's broad back with his open hand. "I know you're drunk, Spade, and it'll half kill you to walk out in that sun, but I just got a hankerin' to see. Come on; we're goin', too."

Already Obadiah and Carver were twenty yards up the gulch, stumbling over the loose, hot stones and splashing around the pools of tepid black water. Moore seized Spade by the buckle of his protruding belt and dragged him, protesting, after.

"Mustn't let him drink much of this water," chattered Obadiah as he and the Irishman struggled forward, "if it's a thirsty prospector. Yes, see, he's down drinking a barrel of it. Come on, let's hurry!"

A moment more and Obadiah had the shaggy head of the heat-crazed prospector in his lap, shading the tormented man as best he could with his body and bathing the parched lips and brow. Spade and Moore, scarce a minute behind, fell upon the prospector's sack of ore, which Carver had already found and was emptying excitedly upon the sand.

"Gold!" yelled Spade.

"Gold!" howled Carver. "Mine—I got it—it's mine, I tell ye!"

"Shut up." Moore's heavy hand crashed full against Spade Gowdy's thick mouth and he shoved Carver aside. "Don't wake up the whole camp. Course it's gold. What else do you reckon a man 'd pack till he croaked alive like that feller's a-doin?" He indicated the prostrated man.

"Sure, an' I b'lave the parson 'd pack his paint-pot," soothed Carver diplomatically.

The three peered surreptitiously back toward El Oro to see if, by any chance, some one had ventured out in the noon sun and seen them. All appeared quiet. The camp, squatting low amid the baking boulders and shimmering in the heat, appeared deserted. No living thing was in sight. Only the heat waves danced along the crooked white street, distorting the buildings into fantastic shapes.

"Let's hide it," suggested Spade, jerking his head toward the ore, "an' him, too." He motioned to the prospector and winked significantly.

"Know him? Any of you know this man?" interrupted Obadiah anxiously, fanning the patient with his hat. "I'm afraid he's in bad shape."

"Not half as bad as he will be in a minute," growled Spade.

"Help me carry him to camp, boys," begged Obadiah.

"Where'd he git this rock he's packin', Spade?" Moore ignored Obadiah's plea. "Let's smuggle 'im off somewheres an' when he comes alive make him tell where he got hit at."

"You bet, make him tell!" grunted Spade from where, on his knees, he was gloating over the chunks of gold-flecked rock. "Gold—pure yaller gold! Talk about Gawd—well, here he is. This is what everybody worships and grovels down to."

"Lucky dog," murmured Carver, eying the prostrate prospector. "Lucky dog—say! Sa-a-a-a-y!"

Carver looked from one to the other of his companions, then crept softly to the still figure and, bending over it, searched the pockets deftly.

" 'Thou shalt not steal,' " reminded Obadiah gently.

"Bah, ye little snipe!" barked Carver. "Ah, a-a-ah!" Eagerly his fingers drew forth the grimy location notice. Unfolding it, he glanced over the heading and skipped eagerly down to the location. " 'In the Jackear Peak district,' " he read half aloud, " 'about one hundred and twenty miles in a southwesterly direction from El Oro!' "

That was all. Anxiously they gathered together and searched the document for further guidance. There was none. The name of the locator was signed "Henry Blane" in a forceful scrawl, as if the writer, at last the possessor of a fortune, had managed to convey his pride into his writing. Clearly Henry Blane had found a bonanza and was on his way to file his location notice. Immediately the three men became acutely solicitous as to Henry's welfare.

"Here, Parson—" seizing Henry Blane's limp shoulders Moore lifted them clear of the hot sands—"help me pack him over to my cabin."

"Not much—to mine!" demanded Carver, glaring at Moore indignantly.

"Both wrong!" Spade started forward, an evil glint in his dark eyes. "We'll pack him to—to—" Spade hesitated as his eyes caught the gleaming rock scattered on the sand. "No, go ahead, any —— place."

Craftily, as the others lifted the limp form, Spade thrust the rich rock back into the sack and essayed to slip away among the brush and boulders.

Moore, seeing him, halted and unfeelingly let the fore end of Henry drop heavily as he drew his huge six-shooter.

"Come on back with that sack, Spade," he ordered, "or we'll lynch you here an' now! Don't make me bring everybody out from El Oro by my shootin'."

Spade was loath and slow to obey.

"Come on back, you fat booze-hound," Moore gritted, drawing back the heavy hammer with a pronounced *click*. "Come on in!"

"Yes, come on in," added Carver; "lay thot sack on Hennery's belly an' grab holt his belt opposite the parson there."

"And we can take him to my cabin," offered Obadiah; "it's the nearest, anyhow. I can take good care of him there, boys. Come on, Mr. Gowdy, please, and help take this man to my house."

Sullenly Spade obeyed, placing the sack of ore on Henry's lank middle and assisting as Carver had suggested. Thus they stole to Obadiah's neat little cabin on the outskirts of El Oro and set about bringing their patient back to consciousness.

Henry Blane responded nobly to their ridiculous ministrations. While his eyes were yet dimmed with hallucination, his first thought was for his sack of ore.

"Where's my sack?" he demanded thickly. Then, his sight clearing momentarily, he glimpsed the faces of Spade, Carver and Moore bending over him. He quickly amended it to: "Which one o' you got my sack? Which one, I say." Desperately he raised himself on one elbow and clawed for his gun. Finding the weapon gone, he sank back resignedly. "Take it. I know where there's a ledge of it as long as a crazy man's dream. I was a fool to bring any of it along. Awful rough traveling—hot—straight up an' down—more'n a hundred an' twenty mile—cactus an' brush—rock an' loose gravel—sand, sand, sand—sand an' sun——"

TWENTY minutes later Henry Blane awoke, again to inquire after his sack. Then, once more seeing the three hard visages hovering solicitously about his cot, he grunted resignedly—

"Fat chanct a sick feller's got with this layout."

"Why, here's your sack, Hank, right here," bellowed Spade jovially in his best saloon-welcome manner, being exceedingly anxious to retain the esteem of Henry Blane.

"Shure," seconded Carver, equally as merrily. "We was only bringin' it along for ye to have whin ye woken up, Hennery."

He added his hand to help Spade lay the sack in Henry's lap. Jim Moore, too, put forth a hand to assist in the presentation.

"Well I be blowed," gasped Henry, all precedent shaken to the foundation. Then, seeing Obadiah hovering on the outskirts of the trio, Henry suddenly understood. "Ho, there's a parson." He settled back in relief. "Got a parson in camp, hev you? I see now—he made you bring it along. Didn't you, parson? How'd you do it, anyhow? They'd got off with it ef you hadn't been watchin', that I know. Me, too, like as not. Eh, parson?"

"W-w-why, no. I—I'm not a reg'lar parson, I—I just try to be. An' they—" Obadiah strove to believe he was telling the truth—"they aimed to bring it along, all right. They'd fixed you up 'thout me."

"I'll bet they would," grunted Henry Blane positively.

"I'm Gowdy," Spade began heartily. "I run the Nugget Saloon here in camp. When you git to feelin' like it come around and we'll show you a good time. The place'll be yours, an' the house foots the bill. This here's Dan Carver, one of my best bar-men. And this here's Jim Moore, one of the camp's biggest sluicers. He owns a mess of the best placer claims along the gulch. An' say, Hank, being's you've already staked off what you want of your new discovery, can't you let us in on what's left?" Spade paused expectantly.

Henry looked around dubiously.

"We-e-ll," he began slowly, "they ain't much use tellin'. They's only 'bout room for one more stakin'. Yeh, just 'bout room for one more. 'Tain't no cause for a stampede, as they's only room for one more."

"Only one?" wailed Spade in dismay. "Thought you said it was a long one."

"Well, it is a long one, considerin' the quality. Six feet of it 'd make rich men out o' a dozen paupers. Minute I see thet outcrop I begun puttin' up stakes an' monument rocks like a steamboat nigger hustlin' watermelons out o' a melon patch at night. Then, like a fool, I chips off this forty pound o' ore an' hikes for to record. I'm here now, ain't I? An' in a minnit I'll be over at the recorder's office, yeh."

"Just right," assented Moore, "that's the way to do business. But now, considerin' who picked you up, savin' yore life, so to speak, why not go ahead an' tell us where this ledge is, so we c'n get what's left. We'll stake her an' divide it amongst us."

Still Henry Blane was reticent.

"Aw, come on, Hennery," Carver wheedled. "We won't tell anybody. There'll be no stampede. We'll just slip out an' stake her off an' come back and record. Jist look who saved yer life."

"Jus' look!" mumbled Henry, his eyes roving over his saviors. "Yeah, jus' look! Still, I reckon I mought as well tell you fellers as anybody else. You can fight it out amongst yerselves. I got mine all safe, an' there's a million in sight left over, so you oughtn't have much trouble dividin' it. Now listen—I'm only goin' to say it jus' once:

"It lays in a little cañon on this slope of the Jackear Mountains, about the middle of the range, nearest the peaks. To git there go out to Sandy Spring, thirty mile west of El Oro, and then slew off southwest straight toward them Jackears. When you find the right cañon, foller up it till you come to a break—a plumb, blank wall that juts right up out o' the cañon bed. This falls is white rock—you'll know it when you see it if you've had to trace a dozen other cañons before you hit the right one. Well, when you find this white wall in the cañon, you'll know you're in the right one, so go on over and follow up the cañon about a quarter mile more, where you'll come to a spring with some grass around it.

"There'll likely be a couple o' burros there—mine. I left 'em there so's to make better speed gettin' here. It's a turrible rough country between here and there—straight up an' down, and a jack can't hardly make it, an' feed's scarce as honesty in politics. I wanted to come straight across and climb the bluffs where I pleased, so I left my burros behind. It'd take two days longer with jacks."

"Yes, I know it's rough country," conconceded Moore. "I been as far as Sandy Spring and I could see it's rougher 'n—— beyond. Go ahead an' tell us how to find your ledge after we get to the spring where you left yore jackasses. On up the cañon?"

"Yeah, on up the cañon," resumed Henry. "On up about a hundred yards. You'll see it—ledge crosses the cañon floor; sticks up 'bout a foot all along. My stakes are on the right side. Take all you see to the left. There's a million there."

"Come on, men!" Spade turned to go. "Let's start!"

Carver and Moore, without a word, fell in behind him. Only Obadiah tarried.

"Thank you, Mr. Blane!" Obadiah spoke fervently. "Thank you ever so much. I just feel that this is my chance. We thank you ever so much. Use the house while I'm gone."

OBADIAH had to run to catch up with his late companions. Hearing his footsteps, they turned. Spade appraised Obadiah scornfully.

"Why, hello, Jehovah!" he drawled insultingly. "Where'd you think you're goin'?"

"Why, w-w-hy I'm—I want to go along with you, boys," stammered Obadiah, an anxious look clouding his face.

Spade cursed viciously. So did Moore and Carver.

"No! No! Ye poor nut," protested Carver hastily, "it'll be an awful thrip. You'd niver git more'n half-way there. You're too—too weak, parson."

"Sure, weak!" raged Spade. "Why if that dried up little apostle can hike out to where we're goin' I c'n walk to Jerusalem an' back in an hour. Why, you little wart"—Spade glared down at Obadiah—"this is a he-man's game. Trot back to your Bibles, *pronto!*"

"You'd never make it, preacher," added Moore pacifyingly. "It's a hundred and twenty miles of the roughest, hottest going this side of ——. No use your even wantin' to go."

"Oh!" Obadiah's tone expressed real agony. "Oh, boys, let me go along! Please! Let me try, anyhow! I won't ask any favors. If I can't make it I'll drop out quiet-like. I'll take my chances with the rest of you. Just let me go along, please! Then we'll all be together and can stake out the claim in all our names and we'll all have plenty. It's my only chance to make good. I just feel——"

"Shut up, chatterbox," growled Spade menacingly. "You can't go. We can't pack no cripples or babies along. We'll have all we can do to make it ourselves. Come along, fellers."

"Spade's right, parson," added Moore, as they turned to go. "You wouldn't be much force. We'll count you in on it, anyhow. Just keep yore mouth shut about where we went er you'll wish yuh had."

But Obadiah Higgins was not to be so easily talked out of his one great opportunity. He followed, terrified lest he lose his one golden chance to make good. He grabbed Carver and Moore by the sleeves of the soiled undershirts they wore.

"I'm going with you! I'm going too!" he panted, eagerly appealing from face to face, hoping to find a gleam of kindness. Their faces were expressionless and hard. His heart sank. "I'm goin' with you," he insisted doggedly.

Spade Gowdy struck Obadiah's none too firm chin with something like two hundred and twenty pounds back of the blow. Obadiah came up, dusty and weeping with rage. Wordlessly he attacked the astonished Spade with a hail of futile blows that at best reached no higher than Spade's thick, hairy chest.

"Haw," sneered Spade, "you're too white around the gills. Git away!"

With that he heaved with his open hand against Obadiah's meager stomach and doubled him sobbing in the dust.

"Now, here, Obadiah," Carver bent over the cramped little figure. "You gotta go aisy if you hopes to finish out the natural course of yer existence. You're goin' to git hurted if you continue buttin' into this party in this manner. Now I'll tell ye what we'll do. If you'll go home now an' get yer pack ready we'll call along in about ten minutes and git you and we'll all go together. But mind, if you say a word about this to a soul, now or ever, you're a goner!"

"Oh, I won't! I won't tell! I'll go right home and get ready to go along. Oh, I'm so glad!" rejoiced Obadiah, the light of supreme happiness written all over his face. "You'll never be sorry you took me along. Why, I've tramped lots and I can stand the hottest kind of sun. You know I've worked steady around Oro the last six months, and I'm tough as whang leather. I'll go right home and fix up my outfit. I been in lots of stampedes, too, and I know just what kind of a pack I'll need."

Obadiah turned back happily and trotted with a surprizingly springy step toward his cabin.

"Well, come on—let's outfit," ordered Moore sharply. "Hustle!"

Together they hurried along the hot, empty street to make ready for their departure. Ten minutes later they appeared, purposefully prodding a single laden burro out of town in the direction of Sandy Spring.

Obadiah Higgins, standing impatiently waiting in his own doorway, saw them go. He watched them as they skirted the few shacks at the edge of the town and turned into the little-used trail that led to Sandy Spring. He watched them until they became but an indistinguishable huddle, bobbing about in the slanting evening sunlight, vanishing momentarily in the choppy gulches only to reappear, a wavering dot, in the white road against the ridges.

"They didn't want me," murmured Obadiah without malice. "They didn't want me to go along."

Turning, he picked up the little bundle he had prepared and started out alone, his gaze riveted on the Jackear Mountains, which showed low-lying and purple across the intervening miles of gashed and broken hills.

The combined gaze of Moore, Carver and Spade was also turned upon that purpling heap that rimmed the far horizon. Somewhere on the slope of that rugged range lay a tiny, rain-gutted cañon with a blind wall—and a million-dollar prize. Eagerly the three strained their vision toward the distant peaks and prodded the jack purposefully. Thirty miles would the beast carry their packs; the remaining distance of almost impassable country each man would carry his own pack and canteen.

THE next morning the great sun poked his hot orb over the desert rim and smote them hotly with his first rays. Still they plodded the trail to Sandy Spring. It was an hour later when they reached their goal. Thirty miles they had come. Almost without conversation they unpacked the burro, released him and, in the shade of the mesquite and luxuriant water-weed, they wearily cooked and ate their first meal of the trip and lay down to sleep. Their packs, to be light as possible, permitted of no blankets, so the three determinedly scooped hollows in the sand.

The sun hung low in the west that evening before they resumed their journey. They had rested, eaten, arranged their packs and filled their canteens. Eagerly, each with his burden, they resumed their difficult progress. Each hill-top they reached, every cañon-crest they topped, gave them a glimpse of their goal—the Jackear Peaks, a purple and white phantasm far to the southwest. It speeded their steps like the sound of running water to a thirsty man.

Their muscles, unused to heavy work, protested against the pace and each broke into an unhealthy perspiration. With the sweat streaming from them, the setting of the sun was as welcome as a cooling rain. They paused on a barren hog-back to catch the faint breath of air that stirred the sea of heat about them. The country that lay between them and the Jackears spread a gashed and cañoned maze of gravel hills and precipitous cliffs. The entire hundreds of square miles of watershed sloped to the southeast, and countless cañons and washes had carved their gulches in the same direction, pouring their periodical rushes of water into the boulder-strewn channel that drained the watershed into the Gila.

To reach the Jackears without going completely around the vast watershed, they would necessarily be obliged to cross every one of the myriad gulches. Thus, each time they topped a ridge, it was only to scramble down the opposite slope, then across the cañon floor and up the other side. Up and over, across, up and over—constantly.

It was like going across a great city without using the streets. They would climb up the front of the first row of dwellings, zigzag across the roof-tops, avoiding skylights, air-shafts and chimneys; thence slither down the window-ledges and water-pipes at the rear; cross the alleyway only to be confronted by the necessity of climbing up the rear of the next row and across the roof-tops and down the fronts into the street. Once across the street, it would be up and over again and again. Well, that was the sort of a situation Moore and his companions were in.

Added to their difficulties were the tangled growths of mesquite, greasewood and cactus, the loose boulders and hot sands underfoot, coupled with the lack of water and the great abundance of heat. So, with a sigh of regret, the three resumed their march, stumbling down the slope, kicking loose gravel into their shoe-tops and battling with the thorny brush that tore them mercilessly in the growing dusk.

Throughout the interminable night they toiled. They had decided to travel at night, thinking the cooler air without the sun's burning heat would enable them to make better time. They figured they could make the remaining ninety miles in at least three nights' travel. "Walk nights and rest days," they had agreed. So in the darkness they fought their way; crossing the cañons and laboring over the ridges; laying their course as best they could by the stars. Though there was a moon, it was waning and the far-distant Jackear Peaks were not visible as a guide, and the light the moon afforded was negligible. Long before the sun rimmed the eastern horizon with red, Spade Gowdy felt the need of a drink.

"Didn't anybody bring some whisky along?" he growled petulantly. "By——, this is the first time I ever went anywhere without whisky. I'd give ten bucks for jus' one shot, right now. Carver, why'n —— didn't you think to bring some whisky?"

"Why'n't you?" snapped Carver. "I feel mysilf a dhrink or two wouldn't harm a body. But what's the use discussin'? We wouldn't carry it if we had it. I got a plenty to pack as it is; fifteen pound I must have, an' it feels like a ton. No, we don't want whisky."

"I do," insisted Spade. "I do! An' I gotta have a drink, I tell you!"

"Aw, take a drink of water," broke in Moore. "You're lucky to have that. Better go easy on it, too. It may not last."

"Water!" scoffed Spade. "Dishwater! Tastes like a chip. I'd rather drink the washings from the bar-sink. —— any man that'd go off on a trip like this without whisky."

"Cut out the hard luck tale, Spade. 'Twill be hot enough in an hour an' we c'n slape. Kape your eyes open fer wather sign—canteens'll be dhry by night—Howlee Moses! Moore, where're ye headin'? Look, man, Jackear Mountains are down that way—not as ye're goin'!"

Moore, in the lead, paused and followed Carver's pointing finger to where, far down the horizon, loomed the purple maze of the Jackear range. He had been leading them almost due west instead of southwest. They had been crossing the cañons at an almost imperceptible slant to the west.

Moore cursed vividly.

"Well, this ends night travel. How long we been off the track I don't know—eight mile—maybe ten. You bet we'll travel by daylight if it scorches the inside edges of my gizzard. Henceforth we plow straight for that peak. It's up and down like this all the way anyhow, so we might as well try to save by going it straight. Here we are, out maybe six miles of the hardest going this side of forty years in the wilderness."

"Howly Mither!" groaned Carver. "An' what's worse, we gotta walk 'em yet to catch up to where we'd 'a' been if we hadn't walked 'em already. Howiver, there's a consolation—the farther we go, the more likely we be to find a watherin'-place," he finished hopefully.

"Come on, Spade; wake up!" Moore shook Gowdy, who had wilted against a boulder. "You're a hot specimen to go prospectin'." He kicked Spade to his feet.

Two hours hard travel down a cañon brought them upon a tiny seep at the base of a sheer cañon wall, where a cupful of water could be extracted at half-hour intervals.

Exhausted, they prepared to sleep the day out, taking turns watching the water that their canteens might be replenished. Continually Spade bewailed the lack of liquor. His body, so long steeped in drink, craved it to an excruciating degree. Neither food nor water could satisfy; it was whisky that Spade Gowdy craved; his face and the palms of his hands already had begun to swell; his thick speech and strange eyes told of the torture he was suffering.

His companions, distressed, but in a lesser degree, did not seek to ease his misery. Better for them, they reasoned, Spade should drop out. Spade was a burden; with him out of the way they could make better time, and the riches at the end could be divided fifty-fifty. A two-way split meant a half million dollars, and a half million dollars will buy—yes, quite a lot of things.

At evening the discussion arose as to whether they should travel this night or await the dawn. Their rapacious minds reasoned for haste, but their sore muscles parleyed for rest. In the end they decided to abide by Moore's advice and resume the journey at dawn rather than chance going astray in the darkness.

IT WAS Jim Moore who insisted upon the delay and it was Jim Moore who, an hour later, assuring himself the others were asleep, took his canteen and slipped away in the direction of the Jackear range. He was not afraid of losing his way; Jim Moore could lay a straight course in any country by night. Deliberately he had planned to abandon his companions and gain the prize alone—a million dollars and a oneway split.

The discomfort of lying on a gravel bed with muscles stiff and aching from unaccustomed use, together with several hours of sleep during the day, left Carver a trifle wakeful. He had been lying in the sand wooing slumber when he heard Moore's slight stepping. When he was satisfied Moore had not merely gone to the seep for a drink, Carver raised his head and peered after the huge figure that showed darkly against the stony face of the cañon wall. Without emotion Carver impassionately drew his gun from its holster and fired. The range was not long, yet Carver missed. Moore wheeled to return the fire, but Carver beat him to it—two shots in quick succession.

"Cut it out!" yelled Moore. "You got me in the leg! I'm comin' back anyhow."

"You'd better!" grunted Carver savagely.

"Why, what's the matter?" Moore whined. "I was just huntin' a place for us to get out of this cañon in the morning."

"Yis, wid yer outfit all on yer back."

Spade had awakened at the shots.

"What's the shootin'. What's goin' on here?" he gabbled. "Who'n ——"

Moore's voice from the darkness answered the question.

"That's all right, Carver," he compromised ingratiatingly, "I want to come in. Cut out the shootin', Carver; my leg's hurtin' somethin' powerful. Third of a million'll do me, anyhow."

Long before sunrise they had taken up their painful journey. They calculated they were sixty miles from their prize. Sixty miles may not be a great distance over a well-defined road or trail, but it can lengthen out into a horror when cut and gashed by cañons and barricaded by thickets of thorny brush and great gravel ridges. Those sixty miles up and over, down and through, detouring rocky gorges and clambering over craggy precipices, doubly hampered by Moore's injured leg and Spade's growing delirium, were full of toil and pain.

The day passed in laborious misery. They traveled possibly fifteen miles in ten agonizing hours. The night was spent in fitful sleep and on the morrow they took up their task. Moore's injury grew steadily more painful. Of the three, only one, Carver, was in anything like fair shape.

Spade Gowdy had long since ceased to think, and traveled erratically, battling with invisible monsters and reptiles. His craving for whisky was only equaled by his craving for rest. He ate almost nothing, and what he did eat he could not assimilate; his figure became emaciated and his muscles responded slowly. Only occasionally was his mind rational. At such times he begged piteously for liquor and cursed them vehemently for their negligence in coming away without whisky. Yet he hung in line, staggering awfully to keep up, grimly, clinging to the almost forgotten hope of sharing in the prize that lay in the little cañon of the Jackear Mountains.

Jim Moore hobbled at the rear, partly because of his injury but principally to prevent Carver from going on alone. There existed armed peace between Moore and Carver, with the latter constantly alert to seize any opportunity to slip off and leave the slower pair. Moore was equally vigilant to prevent him. Each, therefore, slept but little.

There were hours when they all suffered agonies of thirst. Water was scarce, yet it existed in sufficient quantities that the travelers might, by making miles in futile search, find enough to keep them alive as they went along. For food they cared little, but water—water they must have. Sometimes they came upon water when their canteens were already full. Then they would drink as much as their empty stomachs could possibly hold, and stagger on, harboring the sloshing fluid in their heavy canteens for fear of not finding water again.

Then at times they would find water only after their canteens had long been dry and their tongues and throats parched and gummy. They would fling themselves down beside or even in the lifesaving seep and drink and gorge until they lay cramped and vomiting upon the sands. These were not true men of the desert. They had lived to grow fat from the labor of others.

Four days later—the seventh from El Oro—their search led up a small cañon, one of hundreds that came down out of the Jackear Mountains. Following this, they reached a blind wall, a sheer white cliff jutting abruptly from the cañon floor.

Carver eyed Moore calculatingly.

"This is the cliff Henry Blane told us about," he said.

"Sure is," replied Moore, his hand upon the butt of his heavy six-shooter. "Go ahead."

"What about him?" Carver indicated Spade.

Moore indifferently regarded the swollen face and dull eyes of the once hearty leading citizen of Oro Gulch. Spade was beyond hope of being able to appreciate the great consequences of the moment. Moore's eyes roved over the emaciated, puffed figure and he scratched the back of his hand reflectively.

"He's all in," he remarked lightly "Let's leave him here."

"All right," agreed Carver. "Fifty-fifty?"

"Sure, fifty-fifty. Just right!"

"Half a million," gloated Carver. "I'm goin' up." He started to climb.

"Not too —— far ahead of me, you ain't," snarled Moore painfully dragging his injured foot into step. "I'll set the pace, pardner; you can go ahead, but see to it you don't go too fast. We're close to taw an' I don't stand for no monkeyin'. I'm goin' to see that my name goes on that discovery notice whether we either one of us ever makes it back to El Oro or not, *sabe?*"

WORDLESSLY they climbed over the cliff. Then for a quarter mile they followed the sand wash that, during the rainy season, poured its flood over the break behind them. Rounding one of the countless crooks, they came in sight of an open glade with a spring and a grassy spot about it. Two burros nodding under the thick mesquite put their ears forward inquisitively.

"Henry's burros," exulted Carver. "We're in the right place. Henry left his jacks at the spring. 'Tis only a step to the big find."

"Not so fast, there," warned Moore. "I'm dry. That spring looks like a million dollars to me. I'm goin' to drink first."

"Yis, an' me, too. Shure I'm as dhry as a conthribution box, almost. I'll drink wid ye."

"But we ain't goin' to run for it."

They approached the spring and, flat on their bellies, they drank of the cool trickle. Presently Moore raised his head and peered intently at a reflection in the water. What he saw caused him to look about, and there, on the side of the huge rock that overshadowed and was reflected by the spring, appeared in the big, boyish letters they had learned to know so well:

> Be not Deceived; God is not Mocked.

A few steps farther up the wash, where the cold ashes of a day-old camp-fire spread white against the smoke-blackened base, a great boulder bore the holy legend:

> God giveth Power to the Faint. To them that Have No Might, He increaseth strength. Isa. 40.

In silence the two men stared at each other. Moore broke the spell.

"If he's up there I'll shoot him like killin' sheep," he whispered hoarsely, jerking his head in the direction of the ledge.

Carver nodded approvingly.

In silence they arose, their six-shooters naked in their hands, and stole up the wash to where a ledge of inestimable richness cut across the rock-ribbed cañon, its gleaming content seemingly mocking them in their utter powerlessness, for their quarry was not there. Minutely they scanned all that was visible of the place. The rock monuments and discovery stake placed by Henry Blane were in view to the right, and to the left were the neatly erected monuments of another locator. On the huge, rounded boulders about the discovery stake were printed righteous sentences:

> Thou art my Hope.
> Exalt ye the Lord.

Carver stooped to pry a nugget from the rich vein.

"Goin' to take a sackful?" inquired Moore, himself breaking off a huge chunk with a stone.

"Sack, nothin'," exploded Carver. "I got all I c'n do to get back to Oro. I'm out o' grub, almost." Regretfully he gazed at the vein. "Million!" he muttered, calculating the seamed ledge. "Million! If thot ledge is ten feet deep there's ten million."

Carver swore and slammed his heavy gun down among the sand and stones of the cañon floor.

"If thot little runt was here now I'd shoot 'im into a million scraps. I'd make him look like a nickel's worth of sausage shot from a cannon. Well, I'm goin' up an' look at his —— location notice; mebby the fool didn't have sense enough to get it straight at all."

He cursed again, vehemently, as he strode across to the location monument.

Moore followed. Together they drew forth the folded paper from the piled stones. Written upon it in a prim, stilted hand was the description, according to the legal form, of the location. The length and width of the claim was set forth, and the distance in feet from the point of the notice to each end of the claim, together with the general course of the claim, the date, and the locality with reference to the Jackear Peaks. The name of the claim was set down as "The Crazy Man's Dream" and the names of the locators were recorded therein as:

Obadiah Higgins
Spade Gowdy
Jim Moore
Dan Carver.

Obadiah Higgins had made good.

The two men cursed vividly.

"He's half-way to the recorder now," roared Moore, seizing the paper and rending it into bits, "but by ——, if I catch him before he gits thar, there'll be one less name on that paper. Here, Carver, you catch up Henry's jacks. Let's see if we c'n make it back to Oro. I can go without eatin', but I can't hoof it. Git 'em! Let's go. Spade's done for; leave 'im lay. No! Don't you try pickin' up yore gun. I'm th' gunman now. I'll teach you how to shoot a pardner in the leg'n' cripple 'im. Git them jacks."

A WEEK later two patient burros swayed into El Oro. Dried sweat stood on their shoulders and flanks and they sucked thirstily at their lolling tongues. The hair on their backs was rumpled; evidently there had been riders the day before or, perhaps, the week before that. Straight to the little trough beside the new well-curb they went and thrust their parched muzzles gratefully into the cool water.

Henry Blane, standing protectingly at the side of Obadiah Higgins, who was conversing with a group gathered in front of the recorder's office, shaded his eyes with a gnarled hand.

"Why," he exclaimed surprizedly, "them's my burros!"

Satisfied, the two burros stood before the new well-curb placidly shooing the flies with their bristly tails. Above their drooping heads and contentedly waving ears was the holy reminder—

God is not mocked.

ASSIGNATS

by Henry Leverage

Author of "The Iron Dollar."

WHEN Ivan with the long surname walked down the beach at Novgorod he found three men. These men were sitting on their haunches staring out over the Japan Sea. Ivan spoke to them in English.

"I have a ship," he said.

The first man glanced at the second; the second stared at the third. They rose from their haunches and wrapped their rags around gaunt limbs.

"A ship in this accursed port?" asked one.

"A bloody lie!" exclaimed a second castaway.

"Ah hae me doots," rasped a third derelict.

"It is a fact, gentlemen," said Ivan with the long surname. "The ship is loading between here and Vladivostok. She wants but a master, a mate and an engineer."

The three men grew sad. They had been broken on the rack of peace. They had come ashore at Novgorod in a leaking sampan. The government of Japan was at that moment interested in their whereabouts.

"Our papers were lost in a great storm at sea," said the leader of the trio, whom men called "Micky" McMasters. "You mind the vast simoom?"

Ivan, the Russian, spread out his hands. His great spade-shaped beard fluttered in the warm Japanese breeze. He thumped a be-medaled chest.

"Come with me!" he said. "Papers or no papers—it is you three who shall take the *Shongpong* out across the sea."

"He talks like a poet writes," whispered "Red" Landyard, a Yankee mate, to Mike Monkey, the Scotch engineer.

"Ah hae noo doot he's read a wee bit. How otherwise would he know we were on the beach at Novgorod? There is a price on our heads."

Micky McMasters edged the big Russian away from his whispering companions.

"This ship," asked the little skipper, "this boat you 'ave loading between 'ere and Vladivostok—what flag does she fly?"

"Her home flag is Chinese. Her crew are loyal Russians. Her cargo, now going aboard, is caravan tea. This tea must be taken to America where Victoria on the Island of Vancouver is. Do you know the route?"

Micky felt his heart thump like a mallet inside a cask. He had sweated and toiled and starved on the mud flats of Novgorod. He sensed the coming of a bitter Winter. And here was a hard-eyed Russian offering him and his mates a ship for the Pacific broadside, where white men walked and roses bloomed and shirts could be worn.

"I've steamed and sailed, man and boy," he explained, "going on thirty years. I'm 'Umber born—at Great Grimsby on the North Sea. My mate, the tall man with the red face, is an American out of New Bedford. My first engineer came from Tyneside—where they build good ships. We take no back-slack from nobody. Show me your ship, says I, and I'll work 'er across the Japan Sea and east by the line to Victoria."

"That is settled," said Ivan Alexandrovski. "You may come with me."

Micky McMasters gathered the tattered collar of his dungaree coat around his unshaven neck.

"One more question before it becomes a contract," he said suspiciously. "Are you loyal Russian or are you Bolshevik?"

Ivan with the long surname smiled blandly. He stroked his straggling beard. He stared down at the little castaway.

"Loyal Russian," he said. "I have a home in Vladivostok—where Allied troops are guarding."

Micky turned, jerked his head toward his mates who stood shivering in their rags, and shouted:

"The contract's signed! A fair thing for all of us. We work the *Shongpong* across the western Pacific."

"Ye arranged about terms?" asked Mike Monkey, siding up to the skipper and glancing at the Russian.

"Terms?"

"Bonuses and wages?"

"We'll leave that to our noble friend."

Mike gulped and spat to the mud flat.

"Last time Ah left that," he said, "Ah had nothing coming to me when Ah went ashore."

The Russian drew himself erect.

"The scale of wages," he declared, "shall be, for you three officers, one thousand rubles a week—paid at Victoria."

"How much is a ruble?" asked Mike.

"Two shillin'," hissed the cockney skipper.

"Twa shillin'? That make a hundred pun a week! Ah hae noo doot it'll be well earned before the end of the passage."

"Where's the ship?" asked Red Landyard. "Show me the *Shongpong!*"

The Russian led the way up the beach. Two hours stiff walking brought the castaways to a cove in which lay a rusty tramp flying the Chinese flag and swarming with coolies—like ants on a cockroach.

Mike Monkey stared at the boxes which the coolies were carrying aboard the ship.

"Tay!" he spat. "Aya, it may be tay and it may be something else. Them ain't Chinese marks on the sides."

"Russian!" explained Ivan. "Come with me aboard my ship. You can see the boxes are marked with Russian letters."

Micky McMasters jabbed the engineer in the ribs as they trailed up a shaky gangplank and sprang from the *Shongpong's* unpolished rail at the waist.

"Be careful!" he warned. "Don't ask no bloomin' questions. Wait till we cross the Sea o' Japan!"

Mike gulped. He eyed the decrepit back-stays and standing rigging of the tramp. He ranged a fluttering glance along the dirty planks of the freighter. He shifted his tongue in his mouth as he stared at the drunken-looking funnel, which bore evidences of poorly patched shot holes.

"A rum hooker," he told Red Landyard. "She's had her name painted out about five times. She's no more'n eight hundred tons, if she's that. She's a broodin' menace ov some kind. Ah wash my hands of this voyage."

"You're 'ands need washin'!" snapped Micky McMasters. "Drop below and look over the engines. See hif there's any coal or supplies aboard. Report to me on the bridge."

"D'ye call that a bridge?" Mike pointed forward of the tipsy funnel, which was painted light blue.

"Hit's a better bridge than the mud flats of Novgorod!" Micky said. "Get below and report. I'm skipper 'ere!"

MIKE'S report, delivered between clamps upon a chew of Chinese tobacco borrowed from a coolie, was tense and bitter.

"Ye hae no conception of the state of things below," he told Micky McMasters. "There's only one double-door boiler. It was made in Canton—China. The engines are cross-compound of the vintage of Isaac Watt and Robert Fulton. The coal is Japanese—twa bunkers of it. The stoke-hold leaks and the shaft-alley is full of bilge muck. Ah saw the stuffin'-boxes jettin' water myself. The last engineer of this packet wrote wot he thought of it on the ditty-box door. He said enough. His name was MacFarland."

"What's that got to do with hus?"

Mike walked from starboard to port of the tramp. He stared down at the line of coolies who were staggering aboard under the last of the boxes. He watched the yellow hands of the gang in the fore-hold reach for the cargo. He came back to Micky McMasters.

"Wot's it got to do with us?" he repeated. "It's got a lot. Ah doot if we make Japan—let alone Victoria."

"We'll try," said Micky sadly. "The Russian says we can clear at nightfall. 'E and 'is crew are coming aboard then. I tested the steering-gear. It works. Who got steam up?"

"Three coolies who are sittin' in the engine-room waiting to go ashore. Ah borrowed some cut-plug from them—enough to last the voyage—if it lasts. They can't talk anything but pidgin English. Their clothes are not worth taking—or I'd of taken them."

Micky McMasters rubbed a bristly chin reflectively. He stared at Mike Monkey's faded outfit. He swung his gaze to where Red Landyard stood on the forecastle deck, directing a gang of coolies who were clearing away wreckage which had fallen about the capstan.

"This Russian," he said with an anxious glance at the dark outlines of the shore, "this man who hired us at a thousand rubles a week is some kind of a big labor captain or prince. The coolies salute him. The two Tatars standing guard at that shed ashore bowed when he spoke to them. There's a whackin' mystery 'ere!"

"Ah thought ye would get yer foot in it when ah saw ye chinnin' with that Russian on the mud flat. He is a smuggler!"

"No! 'E don't look like one."

"Looks is only skin deep. He ought to be skinned—with his thousand rubles a week."

"'E 'as nobody to navigate the ship, and the tea 'as got to be taken hover the western Pacific."

"Tay? Ye are daft? D'ye call that tay?"

Mike Monkey pointed a scornful finger at the boxes piled around the fore-hatch. He spat to the bridge-deck.

"That ain't tay! That's opium or hashish or fireworks of some sort. Ah never saw tay boxes with Russian letters on them."

"There is good tea grown in some parts of Russia."

"It's grown! Aye, it's grown! Wot's to prove this cargo growed there. It may have been brought to this cove in a sampan —it may have been brought in a Chinese junk—it may have——"

"'Vast with your 'may-have's!' Get below to the boiler! 'Ere comes a caravan or a funeral. They're Russians of the province of the Don. See their beards and their robes. There's the big fellow who hired us. 'E's a bloomin' juke, that's wot 'e is! Kow-tow when 'e comes aboard."

"Ye told me to go below."

"'Urry hup! Never mind the kowtowin'. You walk straight and take my orders until we get on the 'igh seas."

The first engineer fluttered a pair of pale lashes in the general direction of the squad of Russians who were winding around the shore shed. He climbed down the rusty bridge-ladder and glided for the engine-room companion. He went through the single grating and thrust his hands into the broken pockets of his dungaree trousers as he eyed the three coolies sitting on the crank-shaft of the cross-compound engine.

"On deck!" he roared at the chinamen. "Ye all get on deck, and don't show yer miserable faces here again. Ye're discharged! Ye built my fires in Oriental fashion—upside down with all the Japanese coal on the grates. Ye left me nothing but clinkers and salt water in the boiler and leaking gaskets and——"

The last yellow man stared down through the grating on his way to the deck and departure.

"Plenty much you learn by and by," he said softly—too softly. "Plenty much——"

Mike picked up a rusty spanner. He had drawn this back when there sounded the raucous clang of an ancient gong in the engine-room. Micky McMasters, wasting no time, had rung for quarter-speed forward before the Russian crew were well aboard.

Two men came down the engine-room ladder in awkward fashion. They blinked at Mike. They stared at the engine as if it were an idol in a temple. They stroked their whiskers.

"Are ye coal-passers?" asked Mike.

"Passengers."

"Wot?"

"We are passengers."

"Ah asked ye if ye are coal-passers?"

Mike Monkey pointed toward the low door through the bulkhead which separated the engine-room from the stoke-hold.

"Get forrard!" he rasped. "D'ye know the skipper rang for a turn on the engines? D'ye know there's only thirty pounds ov steam?"

The Russians moved toward the stoke-hold door. Mike picked up his spanner and followed them. He spent the next lurid hour breaking in two green firemen whose manners were sullen and morose.

IT WAS after sundown when the *Shongpong* clamped from her anchorage in the cove and started eastward over the polished waters of the Japan Sea.

A tan-colored moon hung in the sky. A soft breeze swung out from Manchuria. The powdered stars spangled the velvet dome of heaven.

Red Landyard, Micky Masters and Mike Monkey came together on the decrepit bridge of the freighter like three men making a common report.

Ivan with the long surname and most of his following were in the lighted cabin where rose the quarter-deck of the freighter. A lone lookout stood on the forecastle head. He was smoking a long-stemmed pipe. The ashes from the bowl of this pipe made tinder of his whiskers. Now and then he pressed out the sparks and swore in Russian.

A second and sinister figure squatted on the fore-hatch. He had a rifle across his knees. The end of this rifle was tipped with a polished bayonet.

"Standin' guard," said Micky McMasper. "The grand juke put 'im there to watch the tea."

"Tay!" said Mike Monkey. "Ye still insist it is tay?"

Micky squared his jaw. "I know nothing," he said, "save that we are 'oldin' a course for 'Akodate and the Inland Sea, which we should reach this time day after tomorrow—if the steam don't die out altogether."

Red Landyard stared at the Russian on the fore-hatch. He eyed the bright point of the steel bayonet.

"They're quiet now," he drawled, "but we're hardly out of sight of land. I expect I'll have to chain a man or two before long. The forecastle is a volcano. Hear them talking? They're arguing some point in Russian."

Micky swung and eyed the break of the quarter-deck, which showed four lighted port-holes within the smudge of smoke that draped from the tipsy funnel.

"They're doing the same aft," he said. "Ivan, the grand juke, is leadin' in the prayin' or whatever it is. I never saw such a crew for talking. I don't know who are passengers and who are workin' the ship. I wish I'd studied Russian."

"Wot good would that do?" asked Mike Monkey. "They wouldn't reveal their secret plans to us. Wot did they bring the rifle aboard for? Wot's to prove we ain't shipmates with a howlin' bunch of anarchists? They're quiet now. Them twa in the stoke-hold only look at me and chew on their beards when Ah give orders. They're waitin' for somethin'!"

Micky strode across the bridge. He gazed sadly at the ripples that curved from the *Shongpong's* straight bow. He estimated the speed of the ship to be not more than seven knots an hour. There was no bridge-rail log.

He came back to Mike Monkey and Red Landyard.

"Briefly stated," ye said, "we're in the 'ands of Providence. Anything is likely to 'appen with all that talking fore and aft. The course the grand juke gave me is to the Pacific—by the nearest strait. I'm 'olding that course. That's all I know. I 'ave a wife and children at 'ome. I was thinkin' of them when I took the contract to work this ship to Victoria."

Mike studied the little skipper's dungaree jacket and unshaven face.

"How many Russians are there aboard?" he asked.

"Sixty or seventy."

"Then Ah resign if it comes to blows. Ah am weak from starving on the beach of Novgorod. All Ah have been able to find to eat on this hooker is caviar and salt fish. Ah would as soon eat clinkers."

A door slid open aft. A rolling voice struck forward. Ivan appeared, followed by two Russians. They were wrapped to the beards in great coats trimmed with fur. They climbed the bridge-ladder and stared at the binnacle.

"East she is," said Micky. "East, a quarter point north."

Ivan swept the sea with a long glance. He nodded and pointed over the freighter's stumpy jib-boom.

"Japan lays there?" he questioned Micky.

"Yes. Habout four 'undred miles."

"Have you sighted any ships?"

"None, yet."

"If you do call me on deck. Answer no signals. Keep the Chinese flag flying."

"The Union Jack would look better!"

Ivan stroked his beard.

"You take my orders," he said icily. "Avoid any suggestions. Keep away from smoke, sails and particularly gunboats of foreign powers. I'll double the thousand rubles which I have agreed to give you three officers. I'll increase it to two thousand rubles a week."

Mike gulped and drew his scrawny neck deep into his collar. He waited until Ivan and the Russians had descended the bridge-ladder and walked slowly aft to where the light streamed from the open cabin door.

"Ye heard that!" grated the engineer with scorn. "Ah thought it was possible to get a thousand rubles a week. Ah expect nothing now. It's too good to be true. Ah minds the likes o' that Russian! It was in Guatemala where I was paid three thousand pesos a month. The pesos were worth sixpence on the pound."

Micky McMasters shook his head.

"Anyway," he said, "we're on the first leg 'ome to blighty. We're gettin' a free passage. That's something!"

Mike Monkey went below to the clanking engines. Red Landyard stared forward and aft. He entered the chart-house and turned in across the single seaweed mattress it contained.

Micky stood the watch until midnight. He woke the Yankee mate, gave the course and dropped down into the engine-room. He sat with Mike until two bells. The Scotch-Irish engineer was bitter against the Russians. He rose now and then and peered through the stoke-hold door, where a lurid light glowed.

"Twa stokers," he said, "and no fire to speak of."

Micky glanced around in caution as the engineer came back for the third time.

"Investigate the fore-hold," he whispered. "Find out what is in those tea boxes. Don't let anybody see you doing it. There's a plot of some kind aboard this ship."

"They've talked enough for a revolution."

The little skipper paused on the first round of the engine-room grating.

"Get forrard when you can," he whispered. "Open one of those boxes."

Mike gulped and nodded. He drowsed out the morning hours and climbed to the deck at the first crack of dawn. He waited all the day for a chance to creep through the stoke-hold without being detected by the two Russian stokers. A second night came and after night the twinkling lights of the Inland Sea. No chance afforded itself in the passage between the Japanese Islands.

It was morning of the third day when Ivan with the long surname dashed thoughts of a discovery in the forehold by summoning all hands to the waist of the *Shongpong*.

⁂

A WILD seascape greeted Mike's eyes as he hurried up the engine-room ladder and braced his spindle legs athwart the planks.

The dusky outlines of the Japanese Coast were fast fading in the west. The wind swung out of a biting north. The sea had been stirred by the tail of a storm. The dingy freighter, with her tipsy funnel and standing rigging, rolled and tossed. She threatened to have the two masts out of her at any moment.

Micky McMaster stood the bridge with Red Landyard. Ivan and all of the Russians, including the crowd from the forecastle, were gathered beneath the shelter of the quarter-deck's lift. They glanced at Mike Monkey and started chattering in Russian. His eyes lifted over their heads. He gulped and moved his Adam's apple up and down his scrawny throat. He spat to the deck.

The Chinese flag which had been flying from the jack staff had been replaced by a red oblong. It showed baleful in the rays of the sun.

Mike turned his chin. He looked at Micky. The little skipper's jaw was square set. His shoulders were thrown back. There was a fighting fire in his eyes.

"Wot happened?" asked Mike shrilly.

"Our friends are in charge of the ship," said Micky over the bridge-rail. "Come up 'ere! They're going to take a vote for captain, mate and engineer. They say all things in their government should be settled by a vote. They're going to elect a citizen captain."

"Wot is their government?"

Micky gripped the rail.

"Bolshevik!" he snapped.

Mike steadied himself on the wet planks. He spat to the deck for a second time. His glance ranged from the little skipper to Ivan's broad face.

"Ah thought so!" he rasped. "We're deluded men!"

Ivan strode from the press of Russians

beneath the break of the quarter-deck. He mounted the main-hatch. His voice rose and fell with the whine of the north wind. He spoke in gusty torrents. He pointed to the red flag aft. He turned and leveled an accusing finger at the bridge where Red Landyard and Micky stood with folded arms.

Mike squinted at the half-circle of Russians. They were being worked up to a storm by their leader. A fur cap was passed. Into this was dropped slips of paper upon which were scrawled names. A rifle's bayonet lifted above the heads of the Bolsheviki. A club swung.

Mike leaped for the bridge-ladder and climbed to the bridge like a frightened ape. He worked his lashless brows up and down. He spat through yellow teeth:

"Wot's the answer? Wot happened?"

Micky McMasters sighed. He thrust his hands in his pockets resignedly.

"Hit's hall hup!" he declared. "They're electing a citizen captain to take my place. They're voting for an engineer and mate. They say there should be equality on the sea as well as on the land. 'Ere comes hour substitutes!"

Mike glared at three Russians who had detached themselves from the others. One was a former coal-passer. Another had come aft from the forecastle. Ivan made the third.

The Russian stood beneath the rocking bridge and said sternly:

"You mutineers get below to the stokehold. We will guide the *Shongpong* out across the Pacific. We will make our own report without your aid. We need you on deck no longer."

Red Landyard snatched up a belaying-pin from the lee rail.

"—— you!" he shouted. "I signed on as mate—and I'll be mate!"

"And I'm captain!" shrieked Micky.

The fight which followed was all one-sided. A hoarse command from Ivan was answered by a determined rush forward. The Bolshevik horde swarmed over the bridge of the wallowing freighter. Micky and Red Landyard fought them tooth and nail. They swung belaying-pins and a chart-case. They finished their end of the struggle upon their knees—to which position they were beaten by the press of numbers.

Mike, considering discretion the better part of valor, managed to creep along the weather rail and spring for the engine-room companion. He sprawled down the ladder head foremost. He rebounded at the grating. He snatched up a spanner and glared upward. He braced a foot in the pit, out of which flashed the slow-moving cranks of the cross-compound engines.

His chin described a quarter-circle. The companion-way was darkened by the form of a man. Micky, still fighting, dropped down and struck the grating. Red Landyard was hurled after the little skipper. Both seamen had been shorn of most of their clothes. Their faces were bleeding. Welts showed upon their shoulders.

"Gorblyme!" cried Micky. "Gorblyme—give me a hose! Give me hot water! Give me steam!"

"Go easy," drawled the Yankee mate, squinting at the whiskered faces which blocked the entire companion. "There's a few of them left. We didn't kill them all."

"We ought to!" spat Micky. "Bolsheviki? They're red-'anded murderers—that's wot they are!"

"That's my opinion," said Mike Monkey.

"You? You!" sputtered Micky. "Where were you when the fight started?"

"Ah came down here for a pinch bar. Ah was just going up when ye joined me—precipitously."

Micky rubbed his bleeding knuckles. He turned a cold shoulder upon the engineer, then stared upward. He made faces at the Bolsheviki and shook his broken right fist.

"I'll 'ave you know there's a law on the seas!" he snapped. "I'll report this outrage to the next British consul."

Ivan pushed away the men about the companion. He descended two rungs of the iron ladder, turned and sneered into the gloom of the engine-room.

"You are to remain below," he said coldly. "Get steam up and give us full speed. You will be thrown overboard if you do not obey my orders. The citizen captain so directs me."

"Where's me twa thousand rubles?" shouted Mike Monkey. "Coom down here—ye scum of the steepies! Coom down!"

Ivan started descending. He thought better of the action when Mike snatched up an iron bar and brandished it with agility.

"Coom down, ye Bolshevik dog! Coom down if ye dare!"

Ivan called in Russian. A ferocious face appeared over the edge of the companion. The sharp point of a bayonet extended into plain view. The muzzle of the rifle deflected until it was directly aimed at Mike.

He dropped the iron bar to the grating. He held up his hands.

"That let's me out!" he cried through chattering teeth. "Don't shoot!"

"Go forward," Ivan ordered. "You and the American go forward and put coal on the fires. You, McMasters, attend to the engines. None of you three men will be allowed on deck. You will all be shot if you do not keep the ship moving at full speed. Those are the orders of the citizen captain."

Micky picked up an oil can. He squirted a stream at the nearest crank.

"Steam on the engine!" he said to Mike and Red.

The two castaways went through the stoke-hold doorway. The shovels grated on the iron apron before the double fire-boxes. A biting Scotch oath rolled into the engine-room. Micky eyed the steam-gage on the main steam pipe. It was climbing. He glanced upward. The ferocious Russian was standing guard with the rifle. Ivan had disappeared.

DAYS passed in unending drudgery. Food was lowered down at the end of a line. The sentry was changed each watch. Ivan kept away from the companion, though his voice was heard in loud argument concerning the position of the freighter. Micky, stripped to his sweating waist and smarting from the blows he had received, grinned through the knuckle-thick bristle on his lips.

He kept the engines oiled. He saw to it that the throttle-wheel was wide open. Once he relieved Mike at passing coal. The ship made progress of a kind. It was evident that the citizen captain had headed for the center of the north Pacific. There was little danger of a lee shore.

"And may he wander like the Flyin' Dutchman!" said Mike Monkey on the sixteenth day. "Ah hope he's lost."

"No," said Red Landyard, "he's heading somewhere. The course is always east. I can tell by the sun. He hasn't changed a quarter point."

Micky McMasters glared at his two mates. They resembled stokers of Hades. Their skin was blistered. The callouses on their hands had become small cushions. The fighting fire in their eyes alone remained to remind the little cockney skipper what manner of men they were and had been.

"The plot," said Micky, "is thick and 'ard to fathom. For why are they 'eadin' to the States or Canada? No one wants them over there. They'll run their bloody 'eads hinto a noose."

Mike Monkey cocked a grease-lined ear. He blinked.

"Ye hear them chatterin'?" he asked. "They're sea lawyers! Ah hae hopes they start to massacre themselves."

Micky rubbed the bristles on his chin.

"We'll reach land in a day or two," he said. "Then we'll find out the answer for the boxes of tea and the voyage and the other questions."

"Tay!" exclaimed Mike. "Ye always said it was tay. This looks like a tay party. It—it——"

The Scotch-Irish engineer's statement was broken by the appearance of Ivan's bulky form in the companion. The Russian came down to the grating. The sentry pointed the rifle at the group. Mike dodged beneath the forward bulkhead door and waited there with bent head.

"McMasters!" called Ivan. "Come here, McMasters!"

Micky folded his arms across his hairy breast and stared at the Russian.

"What d'you want?" he asked.

Ivan peered through the engine-room gloom.

"We have decided," he said heavily, "that you can join us as a brother. We have voted on it. We will make you rich. You can be one of us."

"I'd rather be a dirty stoker than one of your breed!" replied Micky.

"We are going to give you a chance. You can help us navigate to our port of call. The citizen captain is not sure of his exact position. Assist us to obtain a reading and we will honor you by admission to the Benevolent Order of Reds. We intend to raise one billion dollars in Canada and the United States. We shall give you a share in it."

"To —— with you and your billion!" Micky screamed, brandishing a broken fist. "Get hout of the gangway!"

"Ye did right," whispered Mike as Ivan climbed hurriedly through the engine-room companion and disappeared on deck. "Ye were not to be bribed by the scum o' Russia. Wot's the answer to the billion dollars?"

Micky stared at the point of the bayonet which crossed the sky over his head. He glanced at the flashing cranks of the cross-compound engines. He raised his voice above the noise of their wallowing passage.

"The answer is this!" he snapped. "They're going to Victoria and Canada to raise a revolution. There are a lot of Bolsheviki in 'iding—from Victoria to the Atlantic seaboard. This is a plot to start somethin' against law and order. I'll smash that big grand juke with a 'ammer the next time 'e talks to me. 'E's insulted a British seaman—'e 'as!"

Mike shot a crafty glance at the stoke-hold door. He scratched his greasy neck.

"A plot?" he said. "Ah hae noo doot we can nip it in the bud. All we got to do is to open the bilge-cocks and drown the rats."

"And we go down with them?"

"Aye!"

Micky shook his head.

"We're not martyrs," he suggested cuttingly. "There may be a better way to get rid of the scum of Siberia."

"Set the hooker on fire?"

"We'll roast with it!"

"Ah'll think it over, then."

Mike Monkey disappeared through the bulkhead door. Micky watched the engines for a long minute. He raised his eyes and saw a shadow cross the companion opening. A second bayonet joined the first. Ivan had posted two guards to watch the three men between decks. The big Russian also signaled for more speed. He was answered by oaths from Mike Monkey and Red Landyard.

A LONG, hot day passed. The heat of the stoke-hold and engine-room was a thing to remember. The three castaways sweated beneath the menace of the two bayonets and Ivan's brutal oaths. The sounds from the deck were those of a madhouse. It was evident that the citizen captain did not know his position on the ocean. Once the *Shongpong* headed due south. Her course was changed to northeast. She steadied and clamped onward, holding an uncertain path.

Night brought some relief from the heat. The Japan current was swinging along the American shore. A breeze sprang up. The ship rolled. Lurid oaths from the Russians came down the rusty ventilators. This was music to the castaways' ears.

Midnight and eight bells brought diversion. Running feet sounded on the ship's planks. A muffled cannon-shot echoed from the distance. A shell burst over the freighter's rigging.

Clanging bells for more speed drove Micky from the engine-room into the stoke-hold.

"A gunboat!" he exclaimed. "We're being chased!"

"Ah thought we would be!" rasped Mike Monkey. "Shall Ah draw the fires?"

The engineer's question was answered by a curdling oath from Ivan. The leader of the Bolsehviki descended to the stoke-hold door. He peered through the gloom.

"You heard the bells!" he snarled through his beard. "You all die if you don't keep up steam. We're going to escape from the cutter. Fortunately it is an old one."

Micky McMasters shook his head toward his two mates. He followed the Russian into the engine-room and picked up an oil-can as Ivan motioned for the sentries to get on deck. A silence fell upon the brooding ocean.

Red Landyard appeared between the stoke-hold and the engine-room. He braced his legs and toyed with a short iron bar. Now and then he stared forward to where the crimson light glowed from the fire doors. The steam mounted in the gages. Mike Monkey worked alone. The Scotch-Irish engineer had evolved an idea out of the situation. He had sent Red to the stoke-hold door in order to stand guard.

"What is 'e doing?" asked Micky in a whisper.

"*Sist!*" said the Yankee. "Pretend to oil the engines and keep busy. Don't let the sentries suspect anything. Watch the steam. It's going up to the bursting point."

Micky watched the gage on the main steam leader. It started climbing from one hundred and seventy to one hundred and ninety. It went over the two hundred mark. It dropped and mounted again.

The little cockney skipper heard the fire doors clanging. A baleful light streamed past Red Landyard. A roar sounded in the single funnel. It was as if the ship were equipped with a double-fan forced draft. The cross-compound engine spun like a turbine.

"What's 'e putting on the fires?" questioned Micky.

"The tea!"

"The what?"

"The boxes of tea in the forehold," husked Red. "We broke through and looked the Bolshevik cargo over. It's combustible all right."

"TNT?"

"Nope! Look out! That sentry is cocking his gun. Duck aft. Don't let him see you talking with me."

Micky crawled down the narrow shaft-alley. He sat on the thrust block and searched his heated brain for an answer to Mike's energy. Hours later he heard the scraping of rocks and shale under the *Shongpong's* keel. The ship heeled and plunged on. Her bow crashed upon a shelving beach. The Bolsheviki cursed. A mast went by the board. It splintered the deck. The funnel fell with its load of soot. The engine-room filled with choking smoke.

Mike Monkey burst through this pall. He started mounting the ladder to the companion. Red and Micky followed the engineer. They stood on deck and ranged their smarting eyes over a desperate scene.

The citizen captain of the *Shongpong* had found his port of call—a wooded cove on Vancouver Island. In his zeal at the discovery of the rendezvous he had neglected to stop the ship. The freighter lay with a seven-degree list to starboard. Her deck was a mass of wreckage from fallen standing rigging, mast and funnel. Above this mêlée of twisted lines and back-stays and smoking ventilators, towered Ivan of the long surname, his great spade-shaped beard lifted on high.

His followers swarmed around him on the tottering bridge. A red light showed through the tall stems of fir-trees. This light moved as a signal. A score of furtive shadows flitted in the underbrush at the head of the cove. Russian faces stared out over the shoal waters of the rendezvous. A shout of brotherhood passed between ship and shore.

"Coom on," whispered Mike Monkey to Micky and the Yankee seaman. "Coom aft. They're too busy forrard to notice us. We'll lower the dingey and escape."

The cockney skipper climbed over the deserted quarter-deck and loosened the falls. He dropped the bow of the small boat into the waves that curled astern of the grounded freighter. Red Landyard lowered the after part of the dingey. The three castaways found oars. They rowed for a dark cape that struck out into the cove. They gained the beach of this point and staggered ashore. They turned and stared at the canted freighter.

"See," said Mike Monkey. "They're opening the fore-hold. Ah wish them luck in wot they find beneath the hatch."

Micky squinted through the gloom. He discerned dancing figures on the deck of the *Shongpong*. A bloodthirsty yell of baffled rage rose to the western stars. It was echoed by the conspirators ashore.

"Ah hae noo doot," Mike Monkey rasped, "they found ah had burned all the tay. Didn't Old Whiskers ask us to keep the fires burning hot and nice? Ah kept them burning—at a price. Ah put all of the tay boxes through the fire doors. There's none left."

"What was in them?" asked Micky.

Mike closed a lashless eyelid. He drew a greasy handful of papers from beneath his shirt. He offered them to the little skipper.

"Rubles!" he said. "Bolshevik bonds and rubles! They were bringing them to Canada and the States. Ah hae an idea they were going to sell them to the Reds in both countries. All ah know to be sure is—there ain't no rubles left. Ah found them better to burn than the miserable slag called Japanese coal."

Micky saw a light. He squareset his unshaven chin and pointed south along the coast.

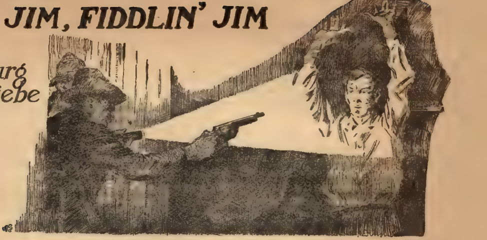
"We'll walk the beach," he said, "until we come to a coast guard. No doubt the cutter that chased the Bolsheviki is nosin' around. We'll show it where to go."

Mike thrust his ruble notes back within his shirt.

"Ah'll keep these!" he declared. "They ain't worth a ha'penny, but they're what we can expect to get for wages if the Reds start runnin' the governments."

JEST JIM, FIDDLIN' JIM

By
Hapsburg
Liebe



Author of "The Lavender Letter," "Godfather to Satan's Kitchen," etc.

HE SAT before a brushwood fire in the mildewed stone fireplace of a moss-covered old cabin low on the breast of Big Blue Smoky. Night had fallen; a chilling Summer thunderstorm was just passing the crest of its fury. He was alone and lonesome; he had made the fire for light, for comfort, for companionship—all three. On his knee lay a battered brown violin, and in his right hand he held motionless a homemade sourwood bow. His topaz eyes were fastened on the glowing coals; there he saw a picture of a slender young woman, barefooted and dressed in a simple garment of calico, whose leaf-brown hair hung in a single plait.

There came a keen clap of thunder, like a farewell message of defiance from the passing storm, and "Fiddlin' Jim" straightened, smiled a little and lifted his fiddle to his chin. He started to play, more or less imperfectly, Schubert's incomparable "Serenade," which he had learned from the prison chaplain's phonograph, when his born-woodsman's eyes fell upon a thing that he had not before noticed. It was a thing the average person would never have noticed.

One of the worn, flat stones of the mildewed hearth had recently been moved.

Jim Braden put his fiddle down and knelt at the hearth. Another moment and he had taken out the loose stone; still another moment and he held in his two hands a wallet of black leather which contained nearly two thousand dollars in paper money of half a dozen denominations. It represented more than a fortune to Fiddlin' Jim. He stared at it in amazement; then he laughed softly to himself. He closed the wallet and thrust it into a rear pocket of his trousers, replaced the stone, sat down on the soap-box chair that was the only bit of furniture the old cabin had and took up his beloved fiddle.

BEFORE he could lay bow to string, however, the door creaked open on its wooden hinges and he half turned his head to see a slip of a barefooted boy standing on the threshold, his clothing soaking wet and dripping, his slight body shaking from the chill.

"Whatever on earth!" cried Jim Braden.

Quickly but with a great tenderness he put the battered brown violin on the floor close beside the soap-box chair.

"Come on in, son! Come up to the fire! My heavens, but it shorely is cold here on Big Blue Smoky, even in the Summer-time, a follerin' one o' these lightnin' starms!"

He threw more brushwood to the flames, which licked hungrily at the fresh fuel.

The boy advanced gingerly, stopped at the edge of the hearth and soberly looked the other over from head to foot. He saw a man of not more than thirty-four, a tall, straight, muscular man whose features were strikingly rugged and strong and yet kindly, whose eyes were unmistakably those of a dreamer of dreams.

The man saw in the lad a good deal of himself. The small new-comer had a determined mouth and chin, and his eyes, too, were those of one who knew both the building and the destroying of castles in the air.

He was sunburnt and freckled, and his hair was of the yellowish-white color that is the result of living in the open without a hat.

Fiddlin' Jim did not strive to connect the presence of the boy with the money he had just uncovered. He rose, went to the door and closed it, took off his old, wrinkled, moth-eaten coat, returned to the fire and sat down.

"Shed them wet clo'es, son," he drawled good-naturedly, "and put on this whilst ye're a waitin' fo' ye clo'es to dry."

He held the coat out to the fire to warm it. The boy eyed him stolidly and silently for a long minute; then he turned his back to Jim Braden, unbuttoned a few buttons and let his faded waist and short jeans trousers fall to the floor. He looked a slim, beautiful, pale bronze statue of enviable youth. Jim Braden draped the little figure with his coat, turned its face toward him and buttoned the garment all the way. The boy smiled faintly in his gratitude to the good Samaritan, spread his wet clothing out in order that it would dry quicker and sat down on the hearth.

"I'm much obleeged to ye, shore," he said finally. "I got lost in the starm and I seed the light. I hope ye don't mind it about me a comin' in, mister."

"Sartinly not," declared Fiddlin' Jim. "It ain't my cabin, nohow. It ain't nobody's in pa'tickler, I reckon. I jest stopped in here a hour or so ago. I'm plum' glad to see ye, son. I was mighty lonesome! Most o' folks 'pears to be afeard o' me 'cause I've been to the penitenchy. I never killed nobody, son, honest I never. I got ketched in a sort o' net, son. I stayed fo' twelve years. The gov'nor, he pardoned me or I might ha' had to stay fo' life, ef I'd ha' lived that long."

"I'm sorry fo' ye, mister," said the lad.

"Thankee! But I shore l'arned somethin' in the penitenchy; I made the most of it, shore," Fiddlin' Jim continued with unusual garrulousness. "The chaplain—it was him, I reckon, that reelly got the gov'nor to pardon me—the chaplain, he said I'd l'arned to look up, fo' one thing."

"Look up?" wondered the lad, drawing the coat closer about his bare legs. "How do ye mean, look up?"

"Why, to see where the acorns comes from," laughed Fiddlin' Jim, "acorns, the manna o' the hawg! A hawg never looks up, son; it hunts fo' acorns under a sycamore tree or a poplar tree the same as it does under a oak. A hawg don't look up to see the sun shine, neither. Also, I l'arned to be glad I'm a-livin'. New gold money ain't any brighter'n life is to me, wi' all I've bore. I shorely don't know why I'm a talkin' thisaway to you, son. I reckon I was so full of it, I jest had to say it. I'd ha' said it to myself, mebbe, ef you hadn't ha' come in to hear it.

"Now s'posen ye tells me a little about yeself, son, eh? I like ye, m'boy; somehow ye 'minds me o' somebody I've knowed somewhere, sometime. Well, come along wi' ye tale, buddy-boy; I'm a listenin'. Tell me whose boy ye are and would ye ruther be a senator, a congressman, or a good fiddler when ye've growed up to be a man?"

The lad looked at Braden solemnly.

"I'd ruther be," he said quite earnestly, "a good fiddler, and I'm Lot Hupple's boy."

Fiddlin' Jim's face showed a big, new interest.

"The one," he asked, "which used to be called 'Bad Lot?' Which used to wear ringlets on his forrard jest to make people laugh at him so's he could pick a quick fight the easier? Big as a skinned hoss and not afeard o' the devil on Friday?"

"That's him," said Lot Hupple's boy. "He still wears them ringlets and he still fights, and they still calls him 'Bad Lot.' I reckon he is a bad lot! The' ain't nobody that can whip him, everybody says. He whipped a whole loggin' outfit oncet—sup'rintendent and all. My name is 'Little Jim' Braden."

"Little Jim Braden!" exploded big Jim Braden. "What—how—how come it Lot named ye that, son?"

"Dunno 'zackly. But I think he used to have a friend named Jim Braden, mebbe. What's yore name, mister?"

"Me?"

Fiddlin' Jim was again staring at a picture in the glowing coals. He saw the slender, barefooted young woman in calico; he saw himself; he saw Lot Hupple, his friend; and he saw Dana, the young woman, turn from Hupple and go with him. Following this, there came the officers, the accusation, trial by judge and jury, and, finally, imprisonment—all within a few months after his marriage to Dana.

"My name," he drawled absently, "is jest Jim, Fiddlin' Jim." Then he asked: "What was ye mother's name, son, and is she yit a-livin'?"

"Dana, and she's yit a-livin'."

"Dana?"

Fiddlin' Jim sat stiffly upright on the soap-box chair. He had never known another Dana. Then he believed he understood. His wife had married Bad Lot Hupple, his friend, after the cataclysm. Bad Lot had thought enough of him, Jim Braden, to name his son for him. It was good of Hupple to do it.

He had heard, in prison ten years before, that Dana was dead. Somebody, he didn't remember who, had written the chaplain to that effect, and the chaplain had told him. He hadn't known how to read and write, and neither had Dana. No message, therefore, had passed between them after his being sent to the State's prison. The fact that she was still living and married to Lot Hupple—he hadn't the least doubt of it—came as a very great surprize to him, and he was so intensely human that he hardly knew, at the first, whether to be sorry or glad.

But when a full realization of the thing had broken upon him, he "looked up," as the chaplain had taught him, and was glad.

ONCE more the cabin door creaked suddenly open, and there stepped across the rotting sill a big man, a Goliath of a man, smooth-faced and sunburnt almost to the hue of weathered copper. He wore ill arranged and straggling jet-black ringlets of hair on his forehead, and his countenance branded him as one most sorely distraught. Fiddlin' Jim recognized him immediately, rose and went toard him with outstretched hand.

"H'lo, Lot!" he cried. "Shorely am glad to see ye, old friend!"

Hupple had recognized Braden before entering the cabin; otherwise he would not have entered. He took Braden's hand and pressed it half reluctantly, then dropped it.

"What's the matter wi' ye, Lot?" smiled Fiddlin' Jim. "How come it ye're so pestered in ye mind, old friend?"

Bad Lot, the Goliath, didn't answer. He took two short, staggering steps backward, as do dark villains of the footlights. Jim Braden went on:

"Ye shorely ain't drunk, Lot?" He was still smiling; his topaz eyes were sparkling in the firelight. "Didn't ye know it's as much fun to play off drunk as it is to ackshully be drunk, and a feller don't have no habbergosh taste in his mouth nor no headache in his head the next mornin'! Honest, what's wrong, old friend?"

"It's the law, Fiddlin'!" Hupple exclaimed, his voice hoarse and a little shaken. "I'm in a mess. I——"

He broke off and turned toward the open-mouthed boy on the hearth.

"What're you a-doin' yere, Little Jim?" he demanded.

The answer came quietly, readily:

"Mother sent me to look ye up, pap. She said to tell ye Bill Freer and three other men is a-watchin' the house, and fo' you not to come home ontel she gi' ye a sign by hangin' a white cloth on the cedar in the front yard where she usually hangs the wash."

Bad Lot clenched his hands and swore under his breath. He looked toward the now deeply concerned face of Fiddlin' Jim.

"Tell me about it, Bad," Braden urged.

Hupple turned to the sober-eyed Little Jim. He did not notice that the lad wore Fiddlin' Jim's old coat; Braden and the lad, themselves, had forgotten it for the moment.

"Son," said Hupple, "sneak down to the creek that runs jest below here and ye'll find a path a-takin' square out to the left, along the bank. Put ye feet in that path and it'll carry ye home. Tell ye mother I onderstand. Hurry up, son!"

The boy rose and slipped obediently into the night. Bad Lot crumpled to the soap-box chair.

"I didn't want him to hear, Fiddlin'," Hupple began. "I'm a-goin' to tell ye everything, Fiddlin'. It was thisaway:

"You know how it allus was wi' me. I was borned onder a bad star, seems like. When anything bad was done, it was allus blamed on me. Well, when you was took to the penitench, I thought ye'd never come back, and Dana, she didn't think ye'd ever come back. I got sorry fo' her, a-seein' her work so hard to make a livin'—you know Dana well enough to know she wouldn't never be nobody's cook, nor sponge offen nobody. I allus loved her, which same ye also know. You a bein' took to the pen gi' her a divo'ce, natchelly. I begged her to marry me and le' me do the work fo' us, and she fin'lly done it. It was most—mostly 'cause I was yore friend, Fiddlin', that she married me.

"Well, you know how it is when a man's repitation is bad. It's awful easy to hang any sort o' crime on his head, and a man has to pull a crooked deal sometimes to git his due. To come to the kyernel o' the matter, Fiddlin', I was 'cused o' shootin' and robbin' a cattle-buyer who'd started out wi' a fat pocketbook, only yeste'day. The's a pow'ful heap o' evidence that I done it; in fact, the's a plenty to send me up. Sheriff Bill Freer and three o' his depities rid out after me this mornin', but I got away. They're still a-chasin' me, Fiddlin', and I shore don't know what I'm a-goin' to do!"

"And—and Dana?" Jim Braden muttered.

"Dana!" cried Bad Lot Hupple. "It's a worryin' her to death!"

Fiddlin' Jim rubbed his chin thoughtfully, bent his head, folded his arms and began to pace the floor. "It's a-worryin' her to death!" still rang in his ears. It must be true, he reasoned. A woman like Dana wouldn't live with a man for so long if she didn't love him.

After some two minutes of thinking, Braden drew up before Hupple, who now sat with his face buried in his hands.

"Ye did rob the cattle-buyer, Bad," said he, "and ye brung the money here and hid it in the hearth."

Rupple gave no sign that he had heard, but he had. Inwardly he winced.

"Ye did rob the cattle-buyer, Bad," repeated Jim Braden.

Bad Lot straightened on the soap-box.

"I ain't said I didn't, did I? Ain't a man got to have his due for a bein' blamed wi' everything?"

"We'll not argify the p'int," said Fiddlin' Jim. "Listen here, Bad. Are ye plum' shore it's a-worryin' Dana thataway? Are ye shore she loves ye, Bad? We've allus been friends, Bad, and ye cain't tell me nothin' but the truth; rickollect that."

Hupple looked the fiddler squarely in the eye. It was one of his own particular long suits, looking people squarely in the eye.

"You know Dana," said he. "Do ye think she'd live wi' me fo' ten years ef she didn't love me? Answer me that, Fiddlin'?"

It was along the line of Braden's own reasoning. Braden nodded. He was satisfied. He leaned slightly forward and put a hand on Hupple's shoulder.

"Would ye be willin' to lead a straight life from now on, old friend," he asked, "ef ye was only out o' this scrape?"

"But who could git me out o' this scrape, Fiddlin'?"

"Me, Bad Lot, mebbe."

"But how could ye do it?"

"I don't know, jest yit. Howsomever, the's a way, Bad; the's got to be a way. It's fo' the sake o' Dana and the boy as well as fo' you, and it's got to be done. Promise me faithful to square up, old friend; that's all ye've got to do, that and ye must stay hid fo' a week or so, ontel I can shift the blame. Are ye a-promisin' me faithful, Bad?"

"Am I?"

Hupple went to his feet. He seized Fiddlin' Jim's hand and wrung it and gave his word with a rather fearful oath.

JUST then there came a tiny noise from the darkness outside; it was the breaking of a wet bit of rotting wood. Jim Braden snatched up the boy's sodden clothing and flung it over the bed of coals in the fireplace, plunging the interior of the cabin into total darkness. Another second and the door creaked on its wooden hinges, and the blinding white rays of an electric flashlight fell full on Fiddlin' Jim's startled countenance.

"Up with 'em—quick!" boomed the voice of Sheriff Bill Freer. "Grab the roof, Lot, grab 'er!"

Braden put up his hands. A deputy slipped from the darkness and snapped manacles over Braden's wrists.

"Search him!" ordered Freer.

The deputy obeyed with alacrity. He found the cattle-buyer's wallet in Fiddlin' Jim's pocket and tossed it to the sheriff's feet. Fiddlin' Jim looked to his right and to his left. Bad Lot was not in the cabin. Then Braden's gaze fell upon the one window, and he knew. Hupple had escaped.

"He ain't got any gun," said the deputy, "and it ain't Lot Hupple!"

"I see it ain't," Freer replied. "Pick up that wallet and see if McAutry's name is on it."

The deputy held the wallet to the light.

"Yes," he nodded. "John B. McAutry. It's full o' bank-notes."

Freer stared hard at Jim Braden, whom he had never seen before.

"How come you wi' this, pardner?" he asked gruffly.

Fiddlin' Jim forced himself to smile. For the sake of his friend, Dana and the boy, he set his feet in the path of sacrifice.

"I reckon the game's up fo' me," he said slowly. "I reckon I might as well confess and be done with it. I held up and robbed John B. McAutry, but I didn't mean to shoot him, honest. The gun went off accident'ly, Mr. Sheriff."

"What's yore name, pardner?"

"Jim."

"Jim what?"

"Jest Jim. Fiddlin' Jim," said Braden. "The rest don't matter."

Freer holstered his revolver, took the John B. McAutry wallet from the hands of his assistant, glanced into it and thrust it into his pocket. Then he stepped heavily toward his prisoner. The soap-box chair was in his way; he kicked it aside.

"Look out!" Braden bellowed. "My fiddle—don't ye step on that fiddle!"

Immediately there was the crashing and splintering of dry wood; the officer's foot had inadvertently demolished the battered but much-loved old instrument. It put Fiddlin' Jim clean beside himself; he sprang at Freer like an enraged panther, his manacled wrists notwithstanding, and drove a knee hard to Freer's stomach. There came a roar from the revolver of the deputy, who didn't quite understand, and Jim Braden crumpled to the floor across the poor remains of his fiddle and lay there very still.

FIDDLIN' JIM sat up and looked about him. It was daylight; it was, in fact, around the middle of the afternoon. He was in a perfectly spotless white bed. On the log walls of the room hung pictures in homemade black-walnut frames that seemed somehow familiar. At his right was a homemade table, and on it were a broken vase filled with mountain flowers and a very beautiful, orange-colored violin. On the floor beside the table sat a boy; he had a barlow knife in his hand and he was busily making a water flutter-wheel of old cornstalks. It was little Jim Braden.

A door opened and a woman, half buxom and pretty, but somewhat worn and anxious looking, entered the room. It all seemed queer. The woman saw that he was sitting up, and she hurried to him.

"Jim," she said eagerly, "how do ye feel now?"

He recognized her when she spoke. It was Dana. She sat down on the side of his bed and with a wonderfully gentle hand touched the white bandage that was about his temples. Yes, it was Dana, Lot Hupple's wife; he was a little dazed yet but he knew that much.

"Where's the sheriff?" he muttered. "And what 'come o' the irons that was on my wrists?"

"Bill Freer's gone back to the lowland," answered Dana and she smiled upon him. "The's nothin' ag'in ye now, Jim. Bill Freer said he was awful sorry he busted up ye fiddle and he brung ye a new one. See it there on the table?"

Braden nodded.

"Where's Lot?"

"Dead."

"Dead?"

"Dead—and buried." Dana showed no sign of grief.

"How come that?" asked Braden.

"Bill Freer had to shoot him in self-defense. Freer didn't believe it, when you said it was you robbed John McAutry. He went straight on after Lot, and he got him afore dinner-time o' the next day."

Fiddlin' Jim bent his bandaged head and tried hard to remember more clearly.

"How long have I been here, Dana?"

"More'n four days. The doctor said the bullet broke the bone above ye left temple; he said ye had brain fever or somethin'. And he said ef ye come to, ye'd be might' nigh shore to make it; and ye have, Jim, thank God!"

She choked. There was a little period of silence. The boy dropped his barlow knife and climbed to his knees at the bedside; he watched his mother and big Jim Braden wonderingly. Then Braden spoke again:

"So Lot's cashed up. Pore old Lot! Did ye love him, Dana?"

"No," said Dana. "I told him I didn't and never would, when I married him. I married him 'cause he was yore friend—that is, I thought he was—and 'cause I couldn't make it a-workin' by myself, and 'cause Lot told me you had died in the penitenchy! I'm sorry to haf to disapp'int ye in Lot, Jim, but I've got to do it.

"Jim, Lot owned up to everything afore he went; he seed he'd haf to die. It was Lot that done the killin' that sent you to the penitenchy, Jim. Him and Ben Rouse had a fight, and he shot Ben. You, hot-headed-like, had threatened to fix Ben, as ye'll rickollect, only the week afore. Lot hired them two low-down Sellarses to swear they seed you do it, and that and yore own foolish threat sent ye up. It's no trouble to put Lot out o' my mind, Jim. I ain't never loved nobody on earth, it seems like now, but you—you and this here one baby o' mine which I named after you. He was two years old when I married Lot Hupple. He's yore own boy, Jim."

"My own boy!" gasped Braden.

"Take my word fo' it," begged Dana. "Count up how old he is, and—and everything. Jim, do ye want me back now?"

Fiddlin' Jim turned his eyes, shining topaz eyes, upward. His kindly, rugged face seemed somehow glorified. Dana was afraid; perhaps, she thought, it was his delirium again.

"What is it, Jim, honey dahlin'?" she half whispered, her voice that of the eternal mother. "What is it ye see?"

"Nothin' much," smiled the man who had learned fine lessons of life behind the iron bars of a prison. "I was jest a-lookin' up to see where the acorns comes from."

THE HAVEN

by BERTON BRALEY

("Little Islands tucked away down under the Line."—*Kipling.*)

THERE'S an Island somewhere down below the Line,
It's an Island that I've never even seen,
Where the level beach is delicate and fine,
And the sea is like an opal, blue and green.
Oh, the long tides ebb and flow there and I'm simply sick to go there
Where the phosphorescent combers glow and shine,
And the cockatoos are screaming and the tropic stars are gleaming
On an Island somewhere down below the Line!

I am harnessed in the yoke of everyday;
I am fettered to the humdrum and the dull,
But my thoughts are always wandering away
On the highroad of the eagle and the gull.
Far away from care and canker there's a dream ship drops her anchor
In a blue lagoon of coraline design,
And a slow tide gently heaves me and a dream boat takes and leaves me
On an Island somewhere down below the Line.

There I swing a golden hammock, and a breeze
Brings the heavy scent of jungle-growth and bloom,
And the coconuts are falling from the trees,
And I hear the far-off breakers roar and boom.
It's a dream of drowsy beauty that is kept from me by duty;
It's a glamour never, never to be mine,
But I still can hold the vision of a loafing-spot elysian
On an Island somewhere down below the Line!

SAID AFZEL'S ELEPHANT

by H.A.Lamb

Author of "The Rider of the Gray Horse," "The Skull of Shirzad Mir," etc.

Put cloth of gold upon a fool and a multitude will do reverence to him; clothe a wise man in beggar's garments, and few will honor him. Yet those few will have their reward.—*Turkestan Proverb.*

WE WERE three men with two horses and two swords. We were outcasts in the thickets of the foot-hills of Badakshan, under the peaks of the Roof of the World. We had earned the wrath of the Mogul of India and there were two thousand riders searching for us.

It was the year of the Ox—the year 1608 by the Christian calendar—and Jani Beg, the Uzbek, had taken Badakshan from my lord, Baber Shirzad Mir, sometimes called the Tiger Lord.

Nevertheless, we three were happy. We had taken Shirzad Mir from the hands of Jani Beg, who had marked him for death.

Aye, Shirzad Mir sat in the clean white robes in which he had prepared to die by a twisted bowstring around the neck, and laughed for joy of seeing the sun cast its level darts of light over the peaks and through the trees that gave us shelter. Our hearts—the *Ferang's* and mine—were lifted up for a moment by the warmth that comes with early morning. We had an ache in our bellies for lack of food; we had not slept for a day and a night. Also, I was stiff with many bruises.

"Tell me," said Shirzad Mir, fingering his full beard, which was half gray, half black, "how you got me out of the prison of Khanjut."

While I watched, lying at the edge of the thicket on my side, the *Ferang*—the Englishman, Sir Ralph Weyand—explained how we had climbed through the water tunnel of Khanjut into the walls, and how we two alone had freed the *Mir* while Jani Beg and his men were tricked into looking the other way by a herd of cattle that we had sent to the gate of Khanjut.

He spoke in his broken *Mogholi*, but Shirzad Mir, who was quick of wit, understood.

"And whence came you?" he asked.

Sir Weyand told how he had been sent to India as a merchant, and had been driven from the court of the Mogul by the wiles of the Portuguese priests. When he had done, Shirzad Mir rose up and touched his hand to earth, then pressed the back of it to his brow. This is something he has seldom done, being a chieftain by birth, and a proud man. Sir Weyand rose also and made salutation after the manner of his country.

I watched from the corner of my eye, for my curiosity was still great concerning the *Ferang:* also, for all he had borne himself like a brave man that night, he was but a merchant and I knew not how far we could trust him. While I lay on the earth and scanned the groups of horsemen that scurried the plain below us, seeking for our tracks, the thought came to me that our fortunes were desperate.

We were alone. The followers of Shirzad Mir were scattered through Badakshan, or slain. The family of my lord was in the hands of Jani Beg—upon whom may the curse of God fall. To the north of Badakshan we would find none but Usbeks, enemies. To the east was the nest of bleak mountains called by some the Hindu-Kush, by others the Roof of the World. To the west, the desert.

True, to the south, the Shyr Pass led to the fertile plain of Kabul, but up this pass was coming Said Afzel, the son of Jani Beg, with a large caravan. I had heard that Said Afzel was a poor warrior, being a youth more fond of sporting with the women of his harem and with poets, than of handling a sword. Still, he had followers with him, for he was bearing the gifts of the Mogul Jahangir from Agra to Jani Beg.

Something of this must also have been in the mind of Shirzad Mir, who had been lord of Badakshan for twice ten years, during the reign in India of the Mogul Akbar—peace be on his name!

"I am ruler," he smiled sadly, "of naught save two paces of forest land; my dress of honor is a robe of death. For a court I have but two friends."

Shirzad Mir was a broad man with kindly eyes and a full beard. He had strength in his hands to break the ribs of a man, and he could shoot an arrow with wonderful skill. He was hasty of temper, but generous and lacking suspicion. Because of this last, he had lost Badakshan to Jani Beg, the Uzbek.

He knew only a little of writing and music; still, he was a born leader of men, perhaps because there was nothing he ordered them to do that he would not do himself. Wherefore, he had two saber cuts on his head and a spear gash across the ribs.

Thinking to comfort him, I rose up from the place where I was watching and squatted down by them.

"There are many in Badakshan," I said—long ago he had granted me leave to be familiar with him—"who will come to you when they know you are alive."

"Who will tell them, Abdul Dost?" he asked mildly. "We will be hunted through the hills. The most part of the nobles of Badakshan have joined the standard of Jani Beg."

"The men of the hills and the desert's edge are faithful, Shirzad Mir," I said. They were herdsmen and outlaws for the most part. Our trained soldiers had been slain, all but a few hiding out in the hills.

"Aye," he exclaimed, and his brown eyes brightened. "Still, they are but men. To take up arms against the Uzbeks we need arms—also good horses, supplies and treasure. Have we these?"

* * *

SO WE talked together in low tones, thinking that the *Ferang* slept or did not hear. Presently I learned that he understood, for, with many pains, he had taught himself our tongue.

We spoke of the position of Jani Beg. Truly, it was a strong one. He himself held Khanjut, which was the citadel at the end of the Shyr ravine leading into India. Paluwan Chan, leader of his Usbeks, was at the great town of Balkh with a garrison. Reinforcements were coming through the passes to the north from Turkestan. Outposts were scattered through the plains. Jani Beg was a shrewd commander. Only once did I know him to err badly in his plans. Of that I will tell in due time.

Shirzad Mir, who was brave to the point of folly, said he would go somehow to Agra and appeal for mercy from Jahangir himself. I had been to Kabul and I knew that the intrigues of Jani Beg had made his quarrel seem that of the Mogul and—such is the witchery of evil words—Shirzad Mir seem to be a rebel.

"That may not be," I answered.

Then the *Ferang* lifted his yellow head and spoke in his deep voice.

"I heard at Agra, Shirzad Mir," he said, weighing his words, "that you were a follower of the Mogul Akbar."

"Of Akbar," nodded my lord, "the shadow of God and prince of princes. He was a soldier among many."

"So it has been told me." Sir Weyand rested his chin on his fists and stared up where the blue sky of Badakshan showed through the trees. "When Akbar was in difficulty what plan did he follow?"

"He was a brave man. God put a plan into his head when it was needed. He had the wisdom of books and many advisors."

"And with this wisdom, I have heard he always did one thing when he was pressed by great numbers of enemies."

Shirzad Mir looked thoughtfully at the

Ferang. It was a strange thing that this merchant, who carried a straight sword and came over the sea in a boat, should know of the great Akbar. Verily, wisdom travels hidden ways.

"Aye," he said, "the Mogul Akbar would say to his men that they should attack—always attack."

"Then," repeated Sir Weyand promptly, "we will attack. It is the best plan."

I threw back my head and laughed. How should the three of us, with but two horses, ride against the army of Jani Beg? How should we draw our reins against Khanjut? We should be slain as a lamp is blown out in the wind. A glance from Shirzad Mir, who frowned, silenced me when I was about to put this thought into speech.

"How?" he asked, still frowning.

Then I remembered that I also had asked this question of the *Ferang* and that his answer had freed Shirzad Mir. I drew closer to listen.

"In my country," said Sir Weyand, "there is a saying that he who attacks is twice armed."

He then told how an *ameer* of Spain, whose empire extended over *Ferangistan* and the lands across the western ocean, had sent a fleet of a thousand ships against England in Sir Weyand's youth; and how the Queen of England had fitted out a much smaller fleet, dispatching it to sail against the invader.

"Had we waited for the Spaniards on land, the issue might have been different," he said. "As it was, few of the Dons escaped with a whole skin. The advantages of those attacking are these: they can chose the ground best suited to them; they can strike when they are ready; also, their numbers appear greater in a charge or onset."

The thought came to me that perhaps the *Ferang*, being a bold man, would not hesitate to turn against us if the chance offered. After all, he had been sent by his king to get money and trade concessions from India, and the small province of Badakshan could mean little to him. What did we know of the King of England—except that he had ships and very fine artillery?

Still, at this time Sir Weyand needed the friendship of Shirzad Mir. And, although he was a merchant—which is a getter of money—he never in the weeks to come, and I watched closely, shunned the dangers we faced. Instead he welcomed a battle, and laughed, when he swung his long sword, as if he were about to go to a feast. It is written that a fight is like a cup of strong wine to some. Sir Weyand was such a man.

"True," nodded Shirzad Mir, who had listened with care, "the great Mogul Akbar once, when his men were wavering, went forward on his elephant to a knoll where all could see him; then he ordered his attendants to shackle the legs of the elephant with an iron chain so that he could not retreat. Whereupon his men rode forward, and the battle was won. Yet we are only three against as many thousands. In what quarter should we attack?"

"Aye," I put in, "where? We are not yet mad."

"We are like to be so from hunger or thirst," replied the *Ferang*, "if we do not better our fortunes. I heard you say we had no place to flee, and so we must attack."

"Khanjut?" smiled Shirzad Mir almost mockingly.

But the *Ferang* was not in jest.

"If we had a few score followers, it would not be a bad plan. But that is for you to decide, Shirzad Mir. You know the country. If I think of a plan, I will tell you."

That was all he had in his mind. I was disappointed. Perhaps I had expected too much of him.

"Meanwhile we must eat," I pointed out, feeling the urge in my stomach. "Iskander Khan will surely give us food, also weapons, if he has any."

I did not add that my horse was at the *aul* of Iskander Khan. Last night I had ridden a wild ass from Khanjut. But I did not want to do so again—until my bruises healed.

"It is well," said Shirzad Mir.

So he mounted one horse and the *Ferang* the other. I trotted before them, to spy out if the way was safe. Iskander Khan was the friend who had aided us with his herd of cattle and his two sons the night before. His *aul* was hidden in the hills not far away. But, as we traveled, we did not think to find what was awaiting us there.

II

ABOUT the time of noonday prayers we came to the Kirghiz' *aul*—three dome-shaped tents of willow laths covered with greased felt and hides. Over the opening of the biggest tent were yaks' tails, also an antelope's head. Under this sat Iskander Khan, cross-legged on the ground.

He was a very old man, bent in the back, with the broad forehead and keen eyes of his race and a white beard that fell below his chest. His eyes were very bright and his skin had shriveled overnight. His turban was disarranged as if he had torn it in grief.

He rose unsteadily to his feet when he saw Shirzad Mir. But my lord—because Iskander Khan had rendered him a great service, and because the Kirghiz was the older man—sprang down from his horse and went to meet him. Iskander-Khan touched his hand to the earth and to his forehead three times; then Shirzad Mir embraced him.

"We have come for food," I said, looking for Wind-of-the-Hills, but seeing him not.

Iskander Khan lifted his hands in despair and pointed to the empty huts.

"It is my sorrow," he said, "that Shirzad Mir of Badakshan should come to my *aul* and ask meat when I have none to give. There is kumiss in the cask, and this I will bring you."

He did so, filling a bowl with the mare's milk, which is the distilled drink of the Kirghiz. Neither Shirzad Mir nor I liked kumiss. When we saw how disappointed Iskander Khan was at our refusal, we forced ourselves to drink some. As it happened, this was well, because the strong fluid eased the pang in our insides.

Shirzad Mir glanced curiously about the vacant *aul*. In the days when he had known Iskander Khan, the Kirghiz had many sheep and cattle.

Then Iskander Khan told us what had happened. The herd and flock which his sons had driven to the gate of Khanjut had been taken by Jani Beg, who was greatly angered at the trick we had played on him. Also, the two boys and the daughter of Iskander Khan had been taken by the Uzbek horsemen.

One of the youths Jani Beg had impaled on a spear which was then fastened to the gate of Khanjut. The other Kirghiz had been shot in the stomach with a matchlock ball and thrown from the walls of the citadel.

The girl Jani Beg had had flayed alive. Iskander Khan had been too feeble to ride with his sons. News of what happened had been brought him by a Khirghiz sheep-boy who saw. Truly, a heavy sorrow had been laid on the khan for what he had done for Shirzad Mir.

My lord put his hand on the arm of Iskander Khan and spoke softly.

"It is written that what evil-doers store up for themselves they shall taste. You shall have revenge for the death of your sons. By the beard of the prophet, I swear it."

He felt at the peak of his turban for the jewel he had been accustomed to wear there, intending to give it to Iskander Khan as a token. He smiled ruefully when his hand met naught but the cloth. The small turban of white cotton he wore was part of his grave clothes.

"Truly, Iskander Khan," he meditated aloud, "I am a beggared monarch. I have not even a token to give you for this service."

"I am content, Shirzad Mir."

I thought of the riches that the poet son of Jani Beg was carrying to Khanjut from the Mogul Jahangir, while Shirzad Mir had not so much as a spare horse, and I voiced this thought, being embittered by hunger and much soreness. At this the *Ferang* sprang to his feet so swiftly that I thought he had seen some Uzbeks approaching, so I did likewise. He clapped me on the back, rudely.

"Ha, Abdul Dost!" he cried, "that is the word I have been waiting for. So the caravan of Said Afzel is now in the Shyr Pass? Here is our chance. We will attack Said Afzel!"

"Ride against two score, when we are but three?" I laughed at the man. If he was mad, I must see to it that Shirzad Mir did not suffer from his folly. "I was in Kabul three days ago, and Said Afzel was just setting out. Besides his slaves and personal servants he has a bodyguard of some Pathans. They are well armed; the pass is narrow. Also they have many camels. You know not what you say!"

"Peace, Abdul Dost!" called my lord, whose eyes had taken on a strange sparkle.

"You have not wit to see farther than your horse's ears. Let the *Ferang* speak!"

"It is better to be mad than calm at this time when caution will gain us nothing, excellency," said Sir Weyand respectfully. "Here is a noble chance. Said Afzel does not yet know you have escaped. He will not be watchful of danger. His caravan may be numerous but it is made up for the most part of women and eunuchs. Moreover, in the narrow ravine they must extend their line of march. We can choose our place of attack——"

"And they will dig our graves there," I said.

Shirzad Mir frowned at me.

"And we will have the advantage of surprize," continued the *Ferang*. "Jani Beg will hardly think to send reinforcements to his son because he knows that Said Afzel is well attended. We will have time to gain the narrow point of the pass just before dark—the best time to strike."

"How can three horsemen ride against camels and an elephant in a ravine?" I asked, for I was not to be silenced.

Shirzad Mir was foolhardy of his life and it was plain to me he liked well the words of Sir Weyand.

"We will not ride against them, Abdul Dost. If you had thought, you would remember that we could stand on the ridge above the caravan trail, where our arrows will command Said Afzel's men."

It was true I had not thought of that, in my concern for Shirzad Mir. It angered me—a *mansabdar* of the army—to be corrected by a foreign merchant, and I was silent for a space. Not so the Tiger Lord.

"*Hai*—that was well said!" he cried. "Such a plan warms my heart. Now if we had the strong sons of Iskander Khan—" he broke off with a glance at the mourning Kirghiz. "What men and slaves are with the caravan?"

"I heard at Kabul," replied the *Ferang*, settling his tall body against the tent, "that Said Afzel was a courtier and a gallant—fond of music, toys, verses and the Indian dancing girls. He is bringing a throng of such with him, also several camel loads of treasure as gift from the Mogul. What do we care for eunuchs and Ethiopian slaves?"

"Said Afzel has at least seven Pathans with him," I reminded him. "They are good fighters."

"Are you an old nurse, Abdul Dost?" cried my master in great anger. "Speak again, and I will set you to tend swine!" He turned to the *Ferang*. "Said Afzel is truly called 'the dreamer,' Sir Weyand. He is the most elegant in dress and can recite verses as well as his boon companion Kasim Kirlas, the professional courtier. It is true that he travels with cumberous baggage—unlike his father—and is usually stupefied with *bhang* and opium. I would risk much to set hand on his jewels."

"We would risk much," nodded the *Ferang* bluntly, as was his custom; "especially as there is one of the big Indian elephants in the caravan."

"An elephant!" Shirzad Mir clapped his stout hands and laughed. "*Hai*—an elephant. That would be Most Alast from the stables of Jahangir. I heard it said at Khanjut when I was prisoner. Verily, the star of our good fortune is in the ascendant."

I thought the madness that had come upon Sir Weyand had bitten my lord, for he laughed again and fell to talking in low tones to the other. I strained my ears but could not hear. Being angry and perhaps a little jealous, I withdrew slightly to show them I did not care what they said.

Once Shirzad Mir called to Iskander Khan.

"Have you a great cauldron?" he asked.

The Khirghiz pointed to the ashes of the fire, where a pot stood, large enough to boil a sheep whole.

"Will you give it me?"

Iskander Khan made a sign to show that all he had was Shirzad Mir's for the asking. Once more the two talked together, and I saw them glance at me and laugh. Then Iskander Khan lifted up his white head.

"You will need a good horse, Shirzad Mir," he said slowly. "The one you have is a sorry pony. In a thicket yonder I have Abdul Dost's horse, also an Arab stallion that has carried me for five years. I will fetch it for you so that you may mount as is fitting for a king."

The eyes of the Tiger Lord softened.

"Thrice happy is the man who has a faithful friend," he said and with his own hand helped the aged Kirghiz to rise.

Before the two left the tent to go for the horses, he spoke quickly to Sir Weyand.

The *Ferang* rose and stretched his big

frame. I did not move, for they had not confided in me. He disappeared into the tent and presently came forth, lugging a basket filled with something heavy. I wanted to see what was in it, but I would not show him that I was curious.

He was singing to himself after his strange fashion. He moved with his hands that which was in the basket and put it in the cauldron. I watched him.

When he had nearly finished there came a dog that was hungry and whined. Seeing the dog, Sir Weyand threw him a piece of the stuff he was handling. The dog wagged his tail and carried off the stuff. I saw him eat it.

This was very strange, so I rose up without seeming to be interested and walked toward Sir Weyand, until I could see into the pot.

"*B'illah!*" I cried, for the stuff was rotting swine's flesh, which it is defilement for a follower of the prophet to touch. It had been used by Iskander Khan to grease the tents. The *Ferang*, who knew this, laughed.

"Tell me, Abdul Dost," he smiled, rising from his labor when the pot was nearly full, "is that dog better than you, or are you better than that dog?"

He was a *caphar*, one without faith. Those words might well have cost him his life.

"If I have faith," I answered him sternly, "I am better than that dog; if I have not faith, he is better than I." I laid a hand on my sword. "If you wish a quarrel——"

"Peace!" cried the voice of Shirzad Mir behind us. "It is time we mounted."

He was leading a fine gray stallion, and Iskander Khan had Wind-of-the-Hills. Likewise, the Kirghiz gave to us two good bows and quivers full of arrows—also he brought his own sword from the tent and girded it on Shirzad Mir. What man could do more than Iskander Khan did for us?

"The blessing of God go with you, Shirzad Mir," he said in parting. "I shall stay at this tent, and perhaps——"

"I will come back," said my lord swiftly. "I will not forget."

We watched the bent form of the old man go into the empty tent; then we set spurs to our mounts. The cauldron Sir Weyand had slung on a long pole, one end of which he carried and I the other. Shirzad Mir rode bridle to bridle with him—I following behind. Still they talked together eagerly, like boys with a new sport. Once Sir Weyand looked back at me and grinned.

"If you are afraid to come, Abdul Dost," he said, "you are free to drop the pole and go."

Before I could think of a fitting answer, he was speaking again with Shirzad Mir. Verily, I was angered. The pole leaped and jumped, and I was forced to watch lest the vile fat should fly out on me. There was no doubt in my mind that lack of food had unsettled my lord's brain.

Why else should we ride at a fast trot through the hot ravines of the hills to the Shyr Pass, where at any moment we might meet a wandering patrol on the watch for us? And why did we carry that accursed pig's flesh?

As for Sir Weyand, my brain was black with anger. I wanted to swing my scimitar against his long sword. Had it not been for the events of that evening, I should have done so.

YOUR horses were steaming when we came out of a poplar thicket on a hill near the caravan track and saw a boy shepherd watching us from his flock. When he recognized Shirzad Mir, the lad put down his bow and dropped to his knees.

"*Hazaret salamet!*" he cried joyfully, in the dialect of his tribe.

He had thought Shirzad Mir was dead. My lord questioned him swiftly. The boy told him that the caravan of Said Afzel had not yet passed this point. Our good fortune still held, yet I was doubtful of what was to come. Shirzad Mir bent over the boy.

"Speak, little soldier," he laughed, "how would you like to shoot an arrow in the service of your lord?"

The boy's eyes brightened and he fingered his bow, being both pleased and shy with the attention paid him. He was a slight, dark-skinned Kirghiz—the same that had visited Iskander Khan's *aul*—and the words delighted him. Shirzad Mir honored him by taking him up behind on his horse. My belly yearned for the mutton that we might have cooked and eaten, but my master would not linger.

It was midafternoon, and the sun was very hot. We were in the pass now, and once we met a runner coming up the ravine. It was a man of Said Afzel, and when he saw us he bounded up into the rocks. But Shirzad Mir fired an arrow swiftly. My lord was an excellent shot. From the body we took the message.

It said that Said Afzel would camp that night at a certain level spot in the pass, for the caravan track was too narrow, besides being on the bank of the turbulent stream Amu Daria, to travel at night. Probably Said Afzel liked better to sit on the cushions of a silk tent than to ride.

"God is good to us," exclaimed Shirzad Mir and pressed forward.

Although I still said nothing, I had a great foreboding. No man has ever called me a coward, but our strength was sapped by hunger—we had no armor or firearms. We were acting on the mad whim of the *Ferang*, and for the first time in his life my master had put aside my advice for another's—that of the merchant who made me carry the pot of swine-flesh.

We passed the open place where Said Afzel had planned to camp. We knew now that the caravan could not be far away, and Shirzad Mir sent the boy ahead to spy. He ran swiftly, like a young mountain goat.

We came to the very place where I had first met the *Ferang*, and I bent my ears back like a horse, listening for hoofs on the trail behind us, for here we were in a trap. On one side the cliff rose sheer for perhaps four spear lengths. On the left hand the slope, steep and strewn with rocks and thorns, dropped abruptly to the rushing stream which was deep enough to drown a man.

Truly, I thought, the madness of Sir Weyand had brought us to an evil place. If a patrol of Uzbek horsemen should come behind us we would be caught between them and the caravan.

Even a brave man feels a prickling of the flesh when he knows not what is before and behind him. The mad fantasy of the other two had veiled their minds from danger. Shirzad Mir, to make matters worse, set Sir Weyand and me to rolling some stones into the path from the slope. While we were doing this he dismounted and led our three horses by a roundabout path up to the top of the cliff.

Not until we had the stone heap nearly the height of a man and were panting from the toil—my bruises had not yet healed—did he call for us to cease. Then Sir Weyand made me take the pole with him and carry it up the slope to the top of the cliff. If the foul fat had fallen back on me, I should have struck him, but it was my fate that it did not.

Back into a cedar grove we carried the accursed thing. Here Shirzad Mir had kindled a fire from dried cedar branches.

"The trees may hide the smoke," he said. "Quick—our time is little!"

As if possessed of a demon, Sir Weyand worked at the fire, placing the cauldron over the logs so that the fat began to heat. Meanwhile, Shirzad Mir stood at the edge of the cliff to watch for the coming of the boy.

The sun had dropped behind the peaks at our backs. There was no wind. The scent of the cedars was sweet in my nostrils, but Sir Weyand made me labor over the evil-smelling pot. I had none of his wild hope. For, without doubt, Said Afzel, whom we sought, would ride the elephant, and I had once tried to attack one of the beasts in a battle.

The ravine in which the stream muttered was clothed in shadows and it must have been the time of sunset prayers when the boy came running back up the path, looking for us.

Shirzad Mir called to him, and the youth came nimbly up the cliff, clinging somehow to the sheer rock, until my lord reached him a hand. Then he bowed his head to Shirzad Mir's feet.

"The caravan comes, Lord of Badakshan!" he cried eloquently.

"How many and in what order?" asked Shirzad Mir swiftly.

"Some horsemen, riding slowly, are in front. Then a group of slaves with burdens on foot. Following them some armed riders. Then a black elephant with a glittering *howdah*."

"God is with us!" cried Shirzad Mir. He turned to me merrily. "Ho—Abdul Dost of the dark brow! What think you of an elephant in the ravine of Shyr?"

We had seen none of the beasts in Badakshan before, but something of Shirzad Mir's purpose flashed on me, and I felt the heart-leap of the hunter when he sees game approach his hiding-place. Sir Weyand stirred the fat, which was now boiling and bubbling odorously.

Above the place where we had piled the stones so they would look as if they had fallen down the slope, my lord sent the boy with his arrows. He, himself, took his bow and crawled forward to where he could see him down the pass.

At a sign from Sir Weyand, I helped him lift the cauldron from the fire by its stick. We carried it to the edge of the ravine.

"Go with your master," said Sir Weyand to me under his breath, "and take your bow. I will manage the rest of my task alone."

Nothing loath, I obeyed. Crouching beside Shirzad Mir, I could see the caravan coming up the pass, in the quiet of the evening. The bearers and camelmen were pushing ahead with loud cries, for the camping-place was just around a turn.

IT WAS a brave sight. The Pathans, as the boy had said, were in the lead—lean men, riding easily and fully armed. Next came the Ethiopians, with their heavy burdens. They, of course, were unarmed. I counted seven Pathans.

Then appeared Most Alast, the elephant of the Mogul. He had two red stripes down his forehead, and silver bells at his neck. I could see the white heron's plume of Said Afzel in the *howdah* behind the *mahout*. Slowly, slowly, they came forward.

"It could not be better, Abdul Dost," cried my master joyfully.

I took heart from this. For, though his eyes were shining, he was laughing to himself, which was a good sign. He was not mad. I had begun to see his plan.

Last came the long-haired camels, bearing the women, the baskets which probably contained the treasure, and the eunuch guards of the harem. A few slaves in gorgeous tunics walked with the dirty camelmen.

A lone Pathan brought up the rear. I felt Shirzad Mir's hand on my arm.

"Shoot your arrows among the camelmen, Abdul Dost," he said. "I will take care of the leading riders—I and the boy. When I shout, raise our battle-cry and shout as if you were many men."

I nodded to show that I understood. I strung my bow and waited, lying on my belly. It was just as if Shirzad Mir and I were stalking antelope. Yet never had we stalked such game as this.

The sun had left the pass, but there was still light when the Pathans passed under us and arrived at the heap of stones. After talking together, three of them dismounted and began to clear away the stones, dropping them down the slope into the stream to free the path for the elephant.

We four were silent on the cliff, though I could hear Sir Weyand working at the fire. The swaying *howdah* of Most Alast came nearer—so near I could see the jewels set in the turban of Said Afzel, who was laughing with a fat man on the cushion by him—Kasim Kirlas, I thought. I could have almost reached down and touched their heads.

Then Shirzad Mir bellowed his battle-cry.

"Hai—Shirzad el kadr—hai!"

He leaped to his feet and began to speed arrows down at the riders.

"Hai—Shirzad el kadr!" I echoed, twanging a shaft among the camels.

It must have reached its mark, for one of the beasts yelled with pain. I heard the shrill shout of the boy and the startled cries of the slaves below us.

Then Sir Weyand came to my side.

"St. George for England!" he cried. I asked him later what it was, and he told me.

As he shouted, he pushed the cauldron over on its side. The boiling fat fell on the broad rump of Most Alast.

An elephant has a thick hide, but he is sensitive and nervous as a woman—and the boiling grease was very hot. Most Alast lifted up his trunk and bellowed his pain. Then he charged forward. The *howdah*, with Said Afzel and Kasim Kirlas, slipped its girths as Most Alast shook himself—the fat had missed the *howdah*, to my sorrow—and the two went to earth.

Then Most Alast dashed among the riders. Several horses leaped over the slope in their fright. Finding himself against the stones, the elephant turned in the narrow path and charged back against the camels, which gave way before him. Some stumbled into the brush of the slope. Others pressed against the cliff wall. *B'il-lah*, there was much confusion!

The camels, being frightened and hurt, began to yell also, and the horses too. The black slaves had leaped to shelter and stood watching, their eyeballs showing white. The camelmen sought safety where they could.

Shirzad Mir had reckoned well what havoc an angered elephant would make along that narrow path.

I was a middling shot with a bow, but my lord was a marksman among many. His shafts sought out the Pathans, who had no time to use their matchlocks before they had to leap out of the way of Most Alast. Yet he killed none. Before long, I knew why.

"Hai—Shirzad el kadr—hai!" cried my lord for the last time, and ordered me to seek the horses.

While the boy plied his arrows from the cliff, we two, with the *Ferang*, rode rapidly down until our horses stood at the slope above the pile of stones. Here Shirzad Mir called upon the Pathans to throw down their arms.

A Pathan is a good fighter when and if it suits him. These men were less afraid of us than of Most Alast, who was trumpeting back and forth along the path, heedless of the efforts of his *mahout*. They saw that we were armed and ready. They did not know how many more of us there were.

Three of the Pathans were hurt by the arrows of Shirzad Mir. Two others had fallen among the rocks and thorns of the slope below. The other two were afoot and watching the elephant.

All who could do so put down their muskets and swords and said that they had had enough of the affair. Shirzad Mir would not move until he had seen the two who were in the thorn thicket climb out, cursing, but little the worse for their fall, and join the others. Then we left Sir Weyand, who had picked up a brace of their discarded pistols, to watch the group, and went forward with me at his side.

"Find Said Afzel," he ordered me.

I saw the Uzbek prince leaning turbanless against a rock, feeling of himself tenderly. It is no light thing to fall from the *howdah* of an elephant. Kasim Kirlas, the professional courtier, was stretched on the ground at his feet—but this was no salaam; the man was stunned.

Shirzad Mir caught the dazed prince by the shoulder and bade him sternly walk before his horse. My lord had drawn his sword, and this he kept near the bare neck of Said Afzel.

"Where is the elephant?" he asked me.

I pointed to the stream below and Shirzad Mir laughed aloud. He ever appreciated a good jest. Most Alast had smelled water, and had somehow got himself down the slope to the stream unhurt. He was drawing water up in his trunk and squirting it over his sore back—*mahout* and all. Later Most Alast lay down in the mud. It was many hours before we could get him to leave it.

Shirzad Mir pushed through the bewildered bearers swiftly. Half of the camelmen had fled. One or two of the eunuchs drew their scimitars when my lord came near the camels on which were the women, but when they saw the plight of Said Afzel, with my lord's sword at his ear, they threw down their weapons.

It was a sorry gathering that we grouped against the cliff wall. Eunuchs and slaves are masters of brave words, but I have yet to see the ones who will face danger to their bodies without shrinking. I cast about and discovered that the Pathan who had formed the rear guard had fled.

Shirzad Mir was now master of the field. He called to the boy on the cliff—our foes thought that many more were there—to shoot down the first man of the caravan who moved from his place.

Then he ordered me to ride my horse slowly back and forth among the remaining camels, the women and their attendants, and see that none escaped.

It was now growing dark, so of my own will I set four of the camelmen to building a great fire at the lower end of the caravan and another by the heap of stones. So it happened that when it grew dark we had our prisoners securely between the two fires and could see all that passed.

Shirzad Mir had gone straight to the Pathans and talked with them a long time. Presently he came to me and said:

"They will join my party, being men who sell their swords. For this reason I did not slay them. They were near enough for good shooting. I have cared for those who were hurt. The others are cooking food. In the morning we will give them a sword apiece—perhaps."

With the other attendants we did not speak. They were men of low breeding and jumped to obey our orders. Shirzad Mir kept Said Afzel ever at his side, in case of treachery.

One at a time we ate of the food for which we yearned. The boy joined us proudly, and Shirzad Mir set him to collecting the few weapons of the eunuchs. Of these he made a pile and sat on it, feeling greatly the honor we did him.

Shirzad Mir talked with Said Afzel through the night. There was no chance for me to sleep, but I think Sir Weyand slept a little during his watch over the Pathans. Before dawn I had spoken with the *mahout* of Most Alast and given him a handful of gold from the treasure bags. He—one master being as good as another—consented to serve us.

At dawn I had finished my task. The loads were all recovered and placed on the camels and the slaves' backs. All had eaten. The women were put back on their camels, and the eunuchs herded in front.

At first break of light in the sky we set out, my lord and Said Afzel mounted on the elephant, who was now quiet, the injured in litters borne by the slaves, the Pathans on their own horses, and the sheep-boy on another.

We struck away from the Shyr Pass into the hills. Then, for the first time in two days and nights, I slept a little in the saddle, being weary, but only a little.

III

SAID I not our star was in the ascendant, so that for a space we were given strength to trick our enemies? Later, evil fortune came upon us again, but not then.

Three courses were open to my lord. He could slay Said Afzel, to strike terror into the Uzbeks; he could exchange the prince and the women for his own family, and perhaps a strip of Badakshan; or he could ransom our prisoners for gold with which to pay an army. I urged the first plan, Sir Weyand the second, and the Pathans, who had now cast their fortunes with us, the third.

Our danger was great, for when news of what had happened in the pass reached Khanjut by way of some escaped bearers, the whole army of Jani Beg was sent to hunt us down. As yet we had no followers other than the four uninjured Pathans and the sheep boy, whom Shirzad Mir appointed head of the camelmen and gave a sword, to his great satisfaction. The bearers, the slaves and the camel-drivers were useless to us and would have been glad to fall again into the hands of Jani Beg, who would not drive them through the by-paths of the hills, as we did.

It is written in the annals of India, the curious thing that my master did in this difficulty.

"We will keep the prisoners and the treasure," he said, "and we will regain the foot-hills of Badakshan from Jani Beg; also we will gather together a small army.

And this thing we did, by the will of God. How was it done? We held a *durbar*—that is, a crowning ceremony. The people of Badakshan had been told my lord was dead. The *durbar* showed them he was not.

Verily, not before or since has such a *durbar* been held in Hindustan or Badakshan or Turkestan. We traveled with the caravan through the villages of the hills. At each village Shirzad Mir would dismount from Most Alast and spend money—from the bags of Said Afzel—for a feast.

Wine he bought freely, and food, and scattered silver among the people. So that all might see, he held his *durbar*. Said Afzel, the opium-eating prince, he forced to do homage in public to him; fat Kasim Kirlas, the professional courtier, Shirzad Mir made pay him extravagant compliments; *el ghias*, the buffoon of the caravan, performed his tricks; the musicians of Said Afzel sang—at the sword points of the Pathans—and the dancing girls danced. It was a great feast. Shirzad Mir, looking the proud king he was by birth, sat on cushions under a cloth-of-gold tent which we found in the baggage, and watched idly, saying nothing.

Sir Weyand cleaned his soiled garments and sat at the right hand of Shirzad Mir, as the ambassador from England. Only I did not attend, for at every feast I was out in the lookout places, with certain men of the hills who rallied to our standard, keeping watch. The men of Jani Beg pressed us close. We moved each day, marching in the night to a new village. I kept a good watch and at each new place more of our men came in to see and hear, for rumors of what had happened spread through the hills. Shirzad Mir gave to them gold and weapons from the store we had taken.

In the plain of Badakshan we could not have avoided being overtaken by the cavalry of the Uzbeks. But in the hills they were at a loss—and the people aided us. It was a mad scheme, yet its very madness protected us.

He himself put on the jewels he took from Said Afzel, and—sitting placidly on Most Alast, the black elephant, with the two crimson stripes of the Mogul on his nose—he looked the king he was. The hearts of his old soldiers, who thronged to us from the hills, were uplifted at this sight.

Always Shirzad Mir directed me to travel in a circle, through Anderab, Ghori and Bamian, back to where we had started, at the Shyr Pass. In spite of danger he did this, and we all wondered, until one day we came to the desolate *aul* of Iskander Khan, as Shirzad Mir had planned.

When the old Kirghiz chieftain came forth and lifted up his hands at the sight, Shirzad Mir in his gorgeous robes dismounted from Most Alast and embraced Iskander Khan, while we all watched.

Then my lord pointed to the caravans, to the camels, the treasure and the women.

"Choose," said he to Iskander Khan; "it is all yours for the asking."

But Iskander Khan would not, saying that he was unworthy of such honor. Whereupon Shirzad Mir called for us all to see. He loaded the horse Iskander Khan had given him in his need—the fine Arab stallion—with pots of gold and gems, and put the bridle in the Kirghiz' hand himself.

He put a robe of ceremony on Iskander Khan and girded on him the sword from his own waist.

"This man," he said loudly, "shall be always at my left hand until he dies. Those who do homage to me shall bow to him also."

In this manner did Shirzad Mir pay his debt to Iskander Khan. He was a good man. A man among ten thousand. Aye, among ten times ten thousand.

OH, LORDY, LORDY!

By William Patterson White

Author of "High Pockets," "Lynch Lawyers," etc.

ANDY BALL was so thin he couldn't shift his chew without losing his balance; he owned more freckles to the square foot than a leopard with the measles, and he was in love usual and extensive. He'd a girl in Swing Valley—hasher at the hotel—and two in Torpedo, till they found each other out; he'd another at Morgan's, one at Deep Creek, and the Rafter O cook, all in one year. Which is siftin' along, I'll say.

Outside of his being a idjit thisaway, six foot tall and a little bow-legged, Andy was right human. If he ever used any judgment I didn't know it. I remember special the time he turned his loving nature loose on a three-hundred-pound squarehead young lady with her features all in the middle of her face and a figure so graceful she looked the same anywhere you stood.

Her name was Susy Svenson, and her pa owned a claim back of Baldy. One day, when Andy and me were riding in from the Blue Creek range, we stopped for the night at Ole Svenson's. From that fatal moment, as the man says, his loving nature like to been the death of Andy.

After supper him and Susy got almighty friendly—she could cook like a house afire—and nothing must do the lady but she's got to take Andy into the setting-room and show him the photograph album, which is squarehead for a large evening.

After a while the lamp went out or something, and Susy made a mistake in the dark, missed the chair she's aiming for, and sat down on top of Andy. This was too much for the self-respect of Andy's chair. It busted simultaneous, and the floor is next. The jar overset a fancy clock, weighing six pounds and a quarter, off the chimney shelf, and the same fetched Andy a healthy swipe square between the eyes. Taking the lady and the clock together thisaway knocked Andy cold like a mule had kicked him.

It took thirty minutes and half the tank to bring him to.

"Let's go," he snuffles in my ear when he's able to stand. "Let's go—now."

But going away ain't so simple as he says it. He made the mistake of calling good-by before he's topped his horse, and Susy reached the upper gate first. Go? I guess not. "I skoll gass not!"

"I ban like you, Andy," she says, looking like a stuffed tent in the moonlight and not minding me a-tall. "More better you stay un talk to your leetle Susy."

"We gotta be pulling our freight," protests Andy, starting to swing up quick.

Susy reached out one hand to his collar, and he stopped just as quick.

"Lat's go in de house," she says with a smile you could button behind her ears, and giving him a playful shake that made his teeth rattle. "I ban make you some kaffee."

If it had been poison she was fixing to feed him he couldn't have gone along more reluctant.

"By hal," says Ole, looking after 'em, "I tank I lose mein leetle gal."

"I'll bet Andy wishes he could," I says unthinking.

"He ban like her, huh?" asks Ole, missing the point a mile.

"How can he help it?" says I. "Love at first sight, Ole, that's what."

"Yaw, yaw," says he vigorous. "I gas mabbe I find me gude cook somevare pretty —— quick."

Ole and me tracked along up to the house. Going by the kitchen I looked in the window. There's Andy sitting on a chair in the corner and grinding the coffee like he hadn't a minute to lose.

"By yiminy," Susy was saying, "I skoll teach you how to cook."

Andy didn't say nothing but he sure looked jo-awful faint and despairing.

Susy brought coffee to Ole and me out on the porch, but her and Andy had theirs in the kitchen. Soon Ole went to the corral and I turned in for the night. I'm sleeping fine when Andy woke me up slumping down on the bed.

"Oh, Lordy! Lordy!" says he under his breath, propping his head on his hands.

"What's the matter?" I asks him.

"Whatsa matter?" he gasps in a whisper. "Whatsa matter? Say, Bill—" changing his tone abrupt— "what am I gonna do?"

"Whatcha talking about?" I grins.

"She—she—that female thinks we're engaged," he bubbles out.

"Ain't you?" I says.

"No, I ain't!" he snaps.

"Well," I says, "I thought you was. I thought your falling through that chair together was a new way of announcing it. Shucks, yes. I thought so; Ole he thought so; and Susy she thought so. What could be fairer than that?"

But he paid no attention.

"She thinks I'm gonna marry her," he groans, batting his eyes desperate.

"I'm stringing my chips with hers," I told him. "Yessir, I sure am. If she says you're gonna marry her, you're gonna. No two ways about that!"

"Not so loud!" he shushes at me. "They'll hear you! My Gawd, Bill!" he rants on, hanging to his trouble like a bulldog to somebody's pants. "I didn't even tell her I liked her! I didn't act mushy nor soft a-tall. I wouldn't mind if I had. I'd have it coming to me then. But I hardly put my arm around her more'n part way."

"Which was doing right well at that," I says, "even for a long-armed gent like you."

"I tell you I didn't mean nothing," he insists. "I was just having pity on the poor girl like. I didn't think—Bill, I can't marry her! I can't! Look at her! Just look at her! Why, it's plumb ridiculous!"

I choked off a laugh, and he snarls:

"That's right, make fun o' me! I thought you was a friend o' mine. Will you do this much? Tell 'em in the morning you ain't seen me."

"Sure," I says. "Why?"

"I'm drifting out of here soon's they get some harder asleep," he explains, pulling off his boots slow and gentle.

"Yeah," I says, "I would."

"What makes your voice sound so funny?" he wants to know, suspicious as a weasel.

"Oh, nothing," I told him, turning over on my stomach so's he couldn't see my face, 'cause the moonlight through the window was light as a lamp, and him talking so confident of going away was surely a joke. I'd looked out the window before I went to bed, and he hadn't—yet.

Andy reached out the makings and smoked lugubrious for a half-hour. Then he picked up his boots and tiptoed to the window. I watched him swing one leg over the sill, and I watched him pull it back.

"What's the matter?" I asks him.

"Nothing," he whispers without turning round. "Good doggie," he goes on, flapping a friendly hand outdoors. "Good feller."

I got up and looked over his shoulder.

"I see the dog's still there," I says casual. "I noticed him just before I went to bed."

Andy grunted and looked anxious at the animal. It ain't much smaller than a good-sized calf, and it's unfolded every tooth in its head and growling without a break.

"Didn't you know Ole had a dog?" I asks Andy. "He keeps it chained out in the kennel back of the corral as a rule. He must have turned it loose tonight for some reason."

"You think so?" says Andy. "You're real bright for a young fellow. Good doggie!" He switches to the animal and started to crawl out the window again.

"R-r-r-r-uff!" roars the good doggie and sprung at the window.

Andy fell back inside and cussed, so I turned in—to sleep this trip. I woke up sudden to see Andy sliding out the window slow and cautious. She was two hours later by the moonlight on the floor, and I got up and went to the window. I watched Andy, his boots in his hand, a tiptoein' for the corral. The good doggie was nowhere in sight, you better believe, and the corral was only fifty yards away.

Andy was half-way to the bars when there's a howl at the back of the house and a black streak shot round the corner and took after Andy.

Andy didn't dally. He dropped his boots and ran like a jack-rabbit. But for all his head start he only reached the corral a nose to the good. Andy didn't climb the gate. He just sort of throwed himself at it, and before you could wink he's jack-knifed over and up and was roosting all safe on top the posts. And that dog was capering round below a-uttering the most frightful roars I ever heard. Andy was sure stuck, because Ole had built his corral as stingy as possible, and the bars were so wide apart the dog could sift through most anywheres he wanted. I saw him do it in seven different places just while I stood there.

I looked for Ole and Susy to wake up and rescue the rooster, but they didn't—rescue him I mean. Ole woke up all right, 'cause I heard a snicker two windows down. It wasn't my place, me being a guest and all, to go calling off no dog as big as a calf, even to please a friend. Nawsir! I went back to bed, and the last I heard before I fell asleep was Andy calling the dog names and the dog a-worrying and a-teasing Andy's boots all to little flinders.

Next morning I was up in time to see Susy dragging the dog to his kennel and Andy climbing down mighty stiff and slow and looking after the dog every move he makes.

"Das night air ban bad for folks," says Susy at breakfast, spading fried mush out of the pan. "Mabbe you catch cold, huh, Andy?"

But Andy he hadn't caught cold, only a splinter which made him sit sideways, and he scraped up a nervous smile to go with his, "No, Susy," that would have fooled most anybody. When she told him to come see her soon, his face got as long as a well-rope.

"I'd like to, Susy, honest," he says. "I'm gonna miss you like my right eye, but we're so busy shipping feeders just now I don't see how I can manage it right soon. You can see how it is, Susy."

"I tank more better you come," she repeats.

"I tank so, too," says Ole, and he wiped his mouth on his sleeve, got up from the table, reached a .45 Winchester off the hooks behind the stove and begun to clean it.

RIDING away from Ole's place, Andy was blue and silent a lot. Being in his socks thataway—for them boots wasn't worth saving for patches when the dog had finished with 'em—and that bad night on top of his other troubles, sure combined to give him a discouraged appearance.

"What'll I do?" he says at last. "My Gawd, what'll I do now?"

"You might drown yourself," I says, tapping my nose judicious, "or shoot yourself, or eat wolf-pizen. There's forty ways of committing suicide."

"Aw, you're as helpful as a broken leg," he whines, wriggling like the saddle burnt him. "This is serious."

"You said it was ridiculous a while back," I says.

With that he shut up and didn't say nothing till we're almost back to the ranch.

"I'd take it as a favor," says he, stiff as dry rawhide, "if you'll keep what's happened under your hat."

"You won't mind if I tell Johnny?" I asks, cocking my eye at him.

"Not Johnny!" he busts out. "Whatever you do, don't tell Johnny!"

Everybody knows Johnny's tongue is hung in the middle and flapping eternal. Johnny! What Johnny wouldn't do to that piece of news with his sense of humor—Oh, Lordy! Lordy!

"I ain't gonna say nothing," I told Andy, "but whyn't you drag it? Quit the range? Go off some'ers and don't never come back?"

"There's my claim," he objects. "One hundred and sixty acres almost proved up, and that hundred and sixty I bought off Riley, and that jag o' cows I got running with the Old Man's bunch. Go off some'ers and lose it all? You're talking foolish!"

"You could sell all that stuff," I suggests.

"I couldn't get nothing for it," says he. "You never can at a forced sale."

Andy was always forehanded. Yes indeedy. Not that he was exactly tight, y'understand, but with all his fool lovemaking he never lost sight of the fact that there was a hundred cents to the dollar, corral-count.

"That's whatsa matter," he goes on. "She knows about that land and them cattle. They're what she's after. She thinks I'm a good thing. She's a-fixing to trap me."

"Fixing?" I says. "Well, anyway, Andy old-timer," I tacks on, "let's hope Ole is a poor shot."

He was still cussing when we passed the windmill.

Andy didn't eat much supper that night. Next morning the same. So it went for three days. Then, when nothing happened and no signs of Susy or Ole, he began to chipper up and relish his meals.

The fourth day was Monday. Tuesday the Old Man sent Johnny with a message to Jake Dawson at Blue Creek. Saturday he come back and pounced down on us at supper.

"Congrats!" bawls Johnny, slapping Andy so hard between the shoulders he lost control of a mouthful of coffee and got the hiccups immediate. "Congrats! Y' old fox, whyn't you tell us you was engaged to li'l Susy?"

"Huh—? Andy—? Susy—? Susy Svenson?"

Them punchers went loony demented. And what they didn't do to Andy! No good for him to deny everything, which he done vehement. No good a-tall. He didn't eat no more supper. He took himself and his hiccups out to the woodpile and sat down on the chopping-block.

He must have done a power of thinking out on that chopping-block, 'cause next day at dinner, when Johnny got funny some more, Andy jumped him prompt as a split-second fuse.

Johnny was so took by surprize that Andy hit him three times before he could start. Johnny got a-going final, but one of them three cracks of Andy's was a right to the chin and that had tuckered him at the go-off. He didn't have a chance. Inside of four minutes he's licked an' hollering—

"Uncle! Uncle! Leggo my ear!"

Andy unclamped his teeth and got up off Johnny.

"Listen!" says Andy to the rest of the boys. "Enough is a-plenty. I like a joke but I got my own notion of what's wit and humor, and the next jigger that unloads congratulations on to me or sticks Susy into the conversation anywheres wants to come a-running, 'cause I will."

Nobody says a word, and he went out to the windmill to slosh water on the eye Johnny had closed for him.

TWO days later Riley's young one fetched over a letter for Andy. Andy took it like it's a hot coal.

"Whatcha grinning at?" he grunts to Riley's kid.

"I was just a-thinkin'," says the young

one,' "how you and Susy musta looked when the chair busted."

"Shut up!" says Andy, flushing red as paint, and then the young one near laughed his fool head off and pulled his freight.

I seen Thompson running to head off the young one at the lower gate, but I didn't let on. Pretty soon Andy slid over to me.

"Susy's coming here next week," says Andy, shaking the letter. "She says if I won't come to see her, she'll come to see me. What kind o' girl is she, pursuing a gent thisaway? Where's her pride? Why can't she take a hint? Why can't she lemme alone? Coming here! Her and Ole!"

"And maybe Faithful Fido," I chipped in, but he never noticed.

"Lookit, Bill," he wades on breathless, "you gotta help me. You're the only friend I got in this nest o' lunatics. They all think it's funny. Funny! My Gawd, them jacks would laugh at a lynchin'! —— it all, I don't wanna leave, but I gotta if she's coming here. I gotta. And there's my cattle and my land. I'll have to let 'em go. I'll lose money, Bill, see? Tell you what now, s'pose you ride over there and tell her I've changed my mind and I wouldn't marry her on a bet. That oughta fix her."

"It oughta fix me, too," I says. "What Ole might miss with his Winchester that dog won't overlook. And there's Susy herself. If she'd ever lay a finger on me in anger just once, I'll gamble I'd lose a year's growth. You're sort o' light in the heft, Andy, but she shook you that time like you was even lighter. Nawsir, Andy old settler, going over and breaking the bad news to Susy and her parent ain't my idea of a pastime."

And that's that, as the man says. Andy sags off slack and listless, a-sucking his lower lip mighty gloomersome.

In the evening come supper, the boys was all talking about furniture and courtship. Was sofys stronger than chairs? Would a chair stand a overload? Should a gent hold a lady on his left knee or his right or both? Thompson says that all depends on the lady, and Andy lays down his knife and fork.

"Tom," says Andy, cold as a froze steer, "did Riley's kid say anything about me?"

"I didn't say so," answers back Thompson, "but you can put down a bet Ole Svenson has been saying something about you to Riley's kid."

I dunno how Andy crossed the table, but he's on top of Thompson anyways quicker than he jumped Johnny. Thompson had the luck to juke Andy's first swing, and Andy's knuckles skimmed past and nudged Sam Bleeker square on the kisser. So it's two to one, with Andy taking the short end and using everything from his feet to the crockery.

Of course the folks most concerned, being hurried thataway, hadn't time to aim careful, and when the sugar-bowl shaved my ear I went outside. I think there was four of us tried to get out the door simultaneous, but I know I was winner.

"Lookit!" screeches Simmsy, combing condensed milk out of his whiskers. "Lookit!"

You've guessed it. There's Susy and Ole in a buckboard. She's a week ahead of time.

"Where's Andy at?" she wants to know.

I didn't need to answer that question 'cause just then him and the other two pinwheeled out the door in a tangle. For all she was fat Susy could move quick. In no time she was off the buckboard and had Thompson by the hair. The riot calmed down abrupt. Sam Bleeker and Thompson crawled back into the bunk-house, and Susy hugged Andy till his ribs cracked.

"I ban come take you home mit me," she says. "I tank we skoll marry next veek."

"Lemme change my clo'es," begs Andy, who'd lost most of his shirt.

"Better hurry," advises Ole, and he snaked out that .45 Winchester from under the seat and laid it across his knees.

"I'll be right back," promises Andy, and he scrambles into the bunk-house immediate.

I walked round the bunk-house and, sure enough, he was crawling through a back window.

"Bill," he whispers, pointing to the cottonwoods lining the creek, "I can make it to the creek if you'll keep Susy and Ole from getting suspicious. They didn't fetch the dog along, so I'll be safe hiding out by the flat rock in the box-elders, and by and by you come tell me what's happened and we'll figger out what I better do next."

I thought to myself he wouldn't do much figgering, but right then didn't seem the proper time to tell him that, so I went back round the house again.

I talked fast and easy, and Susy didn't get suspicious for as long as ten minutes. Then she began to wonder out loud where Andy's at. From wondering she went to looking at me kind of hard. I stepped back out of arm-reach. She jerked the whip out of the socket and allowed plenty decisive she's a-going to search the bunk-house.

There's no stopping her. She searched that bunk-house, searched it thorough, and when she didn't turn up Andy she's wild. To hear her take on you'd think she'd lost a gold watch.

And all the time Ole was step-laddering up and down in front the bunk-house a-talking to Heaven about what's he's aiming to do to the skinny shoe-string that's addled the affections of his girl Susy. He didn't leave much unsaid, Ole didn't, and every now and then he'd flick open his breech-cover half-way and see was the cartridge still in the chamber. Also he kept that rifle cocked.

Me personal, I was behind the woodpile and only an eye peeking up now and then. The rest of the boys was engaged similar wherever there's cover. Not that we're afraid of Ole, y'understand, but we couldn't lock horns with him without crowding li'l Susy.

Susy ran down final and shooed Ole into the buckboard and drove off, so I went over to the flat rock in the box-elders where Andy's a-sitting, both ears on the stretch.

"WHAT a relief," he says, easing up luxurious when I told him they'd gone. "But look here, Bill, didn't I hear Susy screaming and carrying on a while back? I sure hope you didn't try to argue with her."

"No," I says, solemn as a coffin, "I didn't try to argue with her and I won't—not while I got my health. And if you wanna keep yours and stay a bachelor you fork your horse instanter and drag it full split. Nemmine your broad acres and them plump cows. Nemmine nothing but how soon you can punch the breeze. You hear me whistling, cowboy?"

Andy's property thataway was the one temptation to last it out, but when he'd thought twice of Susy and her survigorous pa, that half-section sort of dwindled down and petered out, and distance lent enchantment to the view—and the farther away the view was the better pleased he'd be to see it close.

After he'd decided to flit he spent the rest of the night fixing it up with the Old Man to sell his land and cattle for him. It was graying to dawn when Andy and me—I was a witness—come out of the office, and the first thing we ran into outside the door was Susy Svenson and her pa!

Which them two reptyles had outguessed Andy once more. As I found out later, they'd switched back after leaving the bunk-house, cached their buckboard down the creek a mile and laywayed for their prey the best part of seven hours.

There's nothing to do—nothing—absolutely nothing. Andy Ball was a spent shell, a busted flush and a plugged nickel from the second Susy ballooned up from the log she's sitting on and lolloped down on his neck with a glad and joyful cry of—

"Oh, my Andy!"

He got his sentence in less'n five minutes. Susy says they'll drive over to Torpedo that very morning and be married by Judge Jackman. She wasn't taking any more chances, so she wasn't.

Poor Andy! He didn't have no spirit left. He agreed to everything she said without a peep. He was so discouraged and downhearted I cinched up and rode over with 'em to Torpedo just to be sort o' friend-at-the-deathbed-to-the-last like.

At Torpedo there's a hitch. Judge Jackman, who issued marriage licenses as a side line, was out of town. He's coming back on No. 3. So Susy herded Andy down to the railroad station to wait for No. 3. Ole started to take in the saloons immediate, but I trailed along with Andy and his keeper.

Lordy! Lordy! I don't believe Susy hobbled her tongue once them three hours. She got Andy's future mapped out fourteen years in advance by the time No. 3 rolled in.

The first citizen off was Judge Jackman. The second was a two-by-tamarack runt of a squarehead with pop-eyes, a cowhide bag and a tin trunk. He was so short he'd have to climb up to sit down, and he stood there a-mopping his flat face and blinking in the sunlight.

"Axel! Axel!" squealed Susy, stampeding down on him.

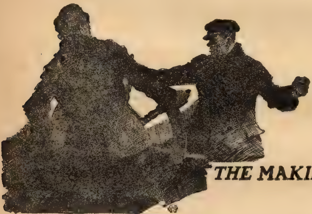
"Mein Susy! Mein Susy!" cried the squarehead, fending her off with the tin trunk and giving her just one quick-action kiss. "I ban glad for find you, Susy. I ban hunt you tree—four year. How you vas, huh? Steel mein leetle Susy? You steel vait for your boy Axel, huh?"

"Sure I vas vait," she tells him. "I vait and I vait and I break mein heart vaiting. I tank you skoll never come."

"Dot's all your fault," says he cross-like and frowning at her like a bandy-legged banty. "You vas leave no address ven you leave Veenona, Meenesota. And ven I come back from de ol' country you vas gone a year already, and I can not find you. And if I haf not seen Yon Yonson in Nort' Platte last veek I tink I skoll never find you. Vy vas you leave no address, Susy? Dot ban no vay for do. You gotta learn do more better, Susy, I tall you. I teach you, you bet. We skoll marry right avay. You need a man for boss you around. Pick up de trunk, Susy, and come along show me vare I buy de license."

With that this half-portion o' nothing handed Susy the cow-hide bag for good measure and spraddled off up Main Street like he owned the earth. And Susy did what she was told exact as a baa-lamb. She'd forgot Andy complete and effectual.

Me personal, I rubbed my eyes to make sure I was awake; then I turned round to ask Andy if he seen what I'd been seeing. But Andy was having hy-sterics.



THE MAKINGS OF A SAILORMAN

By Roy P. Churchill

Author of "The Devil Takes Care of His Own," "Inside and Outside," etc.

HE WAS so big and husky that a pea-coat looked like a vest on him. He sat on the after-bitts abreast No. 4 hatch on the cargo ship *Alta*, his broad shoes resting comfortably on the rail. Presently he came hurriedly into the afterquarters. The *Alta*, deep laden, had scooped up a sea, and he was dripping wet.

"I was settin' on them stumps there," he explained to grinning shipmates, "with my feet on the fence, and the water come right up and hit me."

There you have Orion Saltsman, a big, good-natured country boy pried loose from his native clods and set down, man size and awkward, in the primer grade of old Mother Sea.

"What're you doing in this outfit, Bud?" said the boatswain's mate, spare and gnarled of form and sharp of voice.

The *Alta's* crew, all recruits except the skeleton complement of old-timers, had been aboard too short a time for "Hasty" Day to know them by name, but some men take nicknames as a dog does burrs.

"I aim to learn the work," said the farmer boy with friendly respect. "My name's Saltsman."

"Old Salty, eh?" said Hasty. "You're the one that was after me for red and green oil for the running lights?"

"Yes, sir; I aim to do what they tell me always."

"You do?" said the little man, putting that full measure of sarcasm into the tone to which his five red enlistment stripes entitled him. "Two-thirds of you fellows think salt water is something to gargle your throat with. Give your conning tower an overhauling and see if you can find a brain or two. There's no such thing as green and red oil, but if some of these wise birds think they're going to turn this ship into a vaudeville circuit, they'll find themselves studying art after hours. You don't know what that is, either?" asked Day, as the boy stood, his whole attitude one of question. "Well, it's painting the smoke-stack by moonlight."

Hasty Day was a wonder at handling recruits. His words were as sharp as knives, but they pared away only the outer crust and left the heart unhurt. Instinctively Saltsman knew that here was a man who would tell him just what he wanted to know about this new, strange business and with his scathing tongue would put him right when he went wrong.

The *Alta* was on her maiden voyage with a cargo of barreled oil for an English port. Her skipper, first lieutenant and navigator were merchant seamen serving in the Naval Reserve, and in addition to this deck force she had two ensigns from the Pelham Bay school. Her crew, made up of the different required branches, had been sent aboard her from a training station only three days before she sailed. Most of them were young and enthusiastically eager in their new job, but depressingly green, as far as knowledge of it went.

The first week out, as if to haze the candidates, there swept down across the Grand Banks the best half of a northwest gale, raking the deep laden ship with great green seas that slapped over the battened hatches and whirled and raced up the gangways to plunge in foaming cataracts over the wallowing sides. The *Alta* groaned and pitched and rolled as if she, too, new to the job, were taking a beginner's lesson.

The crew, having lost interest in the palatable concoctions of Tony Ravellotti, the cook, stood unsteadily on the boat-deck or lay in their bunks near convenient deck buckets. The officers and old-timers stood the watches.

Bob Woten, the chief yeoman, had the wheel, and Hasty Day came up to relieve him.

"Course is three hundred and forty degrees," said Woten, "and the old girl's making a trail like a yeomanette's first shorthand—carrying half a turn left wheel. Guess who I relieved, Hasty? Old Salty, the farm-hand wonder. Had the wheel gripped like the handles of a plow, but hanging on and keeping near enough on the course to get by.

" 'Hello, old Salty,' I says to him. 'How's tricks?' He just grins at me and points to the course chalked up there on the weather board.

" 'Where you going?' I asks him, but he didn't answer, having other business at the lee rail. Pretty soon he comes staggering back.

" 'I've had 'em from green apples, and from too much watermelon, and going in swimming after I et, but this here is kinder different,' he confided to me. 'Does a man ever get over it?'

" 'Sure!' I told him. 'All you have to do is to catch a dolphin, get Tony to fry the liver with some onions, and eat that. Then you'll be all set.'

"He thanked me and went after a fish-line. Can you beat it?"

"That'll be enough talking, you two," said Ben Hoskins, the watch officer, coming out of the chart-room, where he had been figuring a time-sight.

"I WONDER sometimes," said the captain, joining a discussion at the mess table, "why some of these boys from inland parts of the country quit the job they know and take up the sea."

The three days' storm had blown itself out and the recruits had settled back into a more normal routine.

"I can tell you why one of them came, sir," said Bert Hardin, looking solemnly across the table at Matthew Cates, the other Pelham Bay ensign. "His name is Orion and, being named for a star, he wants to study navigation."

"He'd better begin lower down than the stars," said the captain.

"He is," said Clinton Nacke, the first lieutenant. "The bunch is breaking him in on swab combs and writing letters to be left in mail buoys, and have had him up at night holding a light at the gangway to see if he could catch a flying fish, with the ship already in forty north and getting in a higher latitude every watch. They've tried every stunt on him that any of the gang knows, and so far he hasn't failed to fall for a one of them. I expect to find him on the masthead any time keeping a look-out for sea-serpents."

So active were his shipmates in Saltsman's education that there came a time when they had to let up on him, not because he had ceased to take their pranks with patient fortitude, but because they had tried out all they knew on him and could think of few new ones.

"Old Salty's getting wised up," confided

Bob Woten. "He only grinned when somebody tried to send him to the pay clerk for the key to the keelson. I'd already sent him after it once, and that was enough."

Hasty Day found Saltsman leading the deck force in the amount of work done in scraping decks, washing paint-work or polishing brass. He did it all thoroughly. In his speech he mixed the idioms of land and sea to the constant merriment of his shipmates.

The new Bowditch which he pored over in his spare time became thumb-marked and torn with much handling, and the two ensigns found him often, in their watch below, at the door of their rooms with questions.

"Now this declination," he would ask; "I don't rightly understand how the old sun plows as crooked a furrow as the book appears to make it. And what's these little crowfeet here on the chart?"

In England he bought a second-hand sextant and learned painfully to take observations and read the vernier, and to keep his thick, sweaty fingers off the already stained arc.

THE *Alta* discharged her cargo of oil and took on general merchandise between decks and enough manganese ore in her lower holds for ballast. The raw cold of the North Atlantic was trying on the recruits. Before leaving the last English port a good many of them had severe colds. The hospital apprentice reported on the third day that he had put two men in their bunks.

"It might develop into influenza," said the captain. "Watch them closely."

The next day the number of sick was increased to nine—all afflicted with high temperature, aching joints and all the symptoms of the epidemic.

"It's the flu all right, sir," the hospital apprentice told the captain. "I'd like to have a nurse, somebody to help me take care of them."

"Take who you want," the captain ordered. "Keep them isolated in one compartment. Keep the place scrubbed and clean."

The hospital apprentice asked for a volunteer at the mess table that evening.

"I'll have to have a little sleep," he said. "I want somebody to go on at night and relieve me. All you have to do is to give the medicine and keep the worst ones covered up and in their bunks."

The men looked at one another without answering. There had been stories of ships found drifting helplessly with all the crew sick or dead. The disease was known to be extremely contagious, and no one was anxious to expose himself. There had come to them letters from their shipmates in receiving stations, telling of the awful toll of sudden death.

"All right," said the hospital apprentice. "I'll just pick out one of you and have the captain issue an order."

"I didn't come here to wait on the sick," grumbled one of the men.

"You just take my job and let me do it then," said Hasty Day, turning on the speaker with withering scorn. "All some of you fellows know about the sea is sightseeing and drawing your pay."

"Do you reckon I could do it?" asked Saltsman meekly from the end of the table.

"Sure, let old Salty do it," came a chorus. "He's germ-proof. If they got on him they'd laugh themselves to death."

"You're it, then, big fellow," said Hasty Day, "if you mean it. But if you want to back out, I'll give one of these would-be comedians a chance. Most of them never got by that place in their lives where they first learned to let old George do the mean jobs."

"I'd try it," said Saltsman. "Neighbors had to wait on the sick a little back home. It'd give me more time for my figgering, too, maybe."

"Unanimously elected," said Hasty Day, glaring about him.

And so it was decided.

In the days that followed, the volunteer nurse had small chance to look into his navigation books. His patients demanded all of his strength and every moment of his time. Patiently he soothed their fever with icy wet cloths, washed their faces and brought them food and drink. In between times, often to the accompaniment of groans and the labored breathing and muttering of men half delirious, he scrubbed and cleaned continuously.

He and the hospital apprentice relieved each other in turns of eight hours each, night and day, while the crew stood aloof, shunning with awe the affected compartment. More men caught the epidemic, until fifteen were down, and one night, while Saltsman watched, a man died, despite the stimulating hypodermic which the hospital apprentice had taught him to use.

The crew grew panicky, fear ridden, suspicious of every cough and sneeze, and went hurriedly away when Saltsman or the hospital apprentice appeared.

Saltsman grew pale and hollow-eyed, but kept cheerful with strength which seemed endless. Hasty Day, one of the few who refused to be in any way affected, asked him about a relief.

"I guess I'd better keep on," said Saltsman. "These others ain't had no fair chance to learn, and there might be some, like little Bobbie White, that I could keep from going even if I did fail with him."

"Seems as if you'd be afraid of getting it yourself, sticking so long," said Hasty.

"I never had nothing in my life," said the other solemnly.

"All right, old Salty, go right to it," said the boatswain's mate. "You and 'Pills' are doing fine, but there's no need to row a good boat on the rocks, either."

Gradually the epidemic began to release its grip on the ship. Those who were seriously ill passed the crisis, and the lighter cases became convalescent. As if its presence aboard had innoculated the rest of the crew with an antitoxin, no more cases appeared.

With his charges giving less trouble, Saltsman took up his navigation again. He had an old pilot chart of the North Atlantic and put down each day with a pencil a ringed dot to mark the position he found. The chart was worn and showed many erasures, and Saltsman's marks, where he had laboriously sought to make his own calculations come somewhere near the correct noon positions, bore a striking resemblance to the irregular outline of a range of mountains. Still he was making progress, and his faithfulness with the sick made the officers more lenient toward his many questions.

* * *

THE *Alta*, bound for the Gulf ports, came to the straits between Florida and the Bahama Islands. At dusk one night she passed Jupiter light. Saltsman had the chart spread out on an empty bunk and crouched beside it on his knees. A penciled cross marked the position of the ship, while he measured from the margin the distance off shore. So engrossed was he that Ben Hoskins, the watch officer, had to call twice, rather loudly, before Saltsman got up and came to the door of the compartment, his stub of a pencil still clutched in his fingers.

"Give me a shot of something for my head, will you?" demanded the officer. "Make it pretty strong, too."

"Yes sir," said Saltsman and unlocked the little woven-wire clothes locker that he and the hospital apprentice had taken for a medicine chest.

"Has the doctor given you anything yet?" asked Saltsman.

"No! What's that got to do with it? Shake a leg and let's have something. I'm on watch."

The navigator was cross and irritable. He was unused to sickness of any kind. His temples throbbed, and a burning cord seemed to draw at the back of his head. He felt feverish, and his throat was parched and dry. Saltsman rolled out from a bottle labeled "aspirin," a couple of white pellets and drew off a glass of water.

"This here's for the headache, sir," he said. "Let 'em go down whole. It generally takes two doses if the headache's bad. I'll bring the other up to the bridge when it's time for it."

The officer swallowed the medicine, and Saltsman watched him walk rather unsteadily to the boat-deck ladder and climb up.

"He acts like he's got it, too," he said to himself and started back to the chart room, pausing to close the medicine chest. "By golly," he said as he eyed the row of bottles, "doc always gives salts, too, and I forgot it."

Pouring out a liberal dose into the glass Hoskins had used, he dissolved it in water heated over a little alcohol lamp. Then, making a round of the patients and seeing them all quiet, he followed the officer to the bridge.

The night was dark and heavily overcast. The wind which had been blowing from almost dead ahead, was now abeam. Coming from the lighted compartment to the darkened bridge, Saltsman could not see very well at first. Only the quartermaster at the wheel and the dark blur of a bundled up signal-boy pacing back and forth were in sight.

"Where's Mr. Hoskins?" asked Saltsman in low tones, going over and looking into the binnacle past the helmsman's shoulder.

"Back to the chart-room, I guess. What're you doing, Salty? Helping him navigate?"

Saltsman grinned. Being kidded about studying navigation had never worried him.

"I brought him some medicine," he said.

"Well, you'd better give it to him," said the other. "He's peevish enough to heave you over the side if he catches you chewing the fat with the man at the wheel. Beat it now, before you're caught."

Saltsman could not resist another look at the compass, despite the other's warning.

Saltsman noted that the course was two hundred and seventy degrees. He repeated the figures over to himself to keep from forgetting them as he went toward the chart-room.

The side door was open, and at its entrance he called softly. Getting no answer, he went on in. At once he caught the sound of heavy, labored breathing, and in a moment he was kneeling over the officer's body lying full length on the deck. Saltsman took hold of his shoulder and shook him. Hoskins groaned, threshed up with his arms and sent the glass which Saltsman held spinning across the deck.

The motion was one of delirium and from his nursing the sailor recognized it, even in the dark. He put his hand on the officer's forehead and then down inside his shirt. The man seemed afire with the fever that racked him. Saltsman wondered what to do next. In the back of his consciousness he was still repeating the course he had read from the compass, and suddenly he realized it was wrong. He had just left half an hour's painful study of his chart and remembered that the true course was almost south.

"Two hundred and seventy degrees," he said. "Ought to be one hundred and seventy, or near-abouts."

He shook Hoskins again and tried to rouse him. Then he thought of the night order book, the purpose of which he had tried so faithfully to memorize. Leaving Hoskins, he switched on the light over the broad desk where the charts were spread and found the course written in ink as plainly as could be—signed with the captain's initials—"One hundred and seventy degrees." The chart was there also, to show plainly that the course should be almost due south instead of west.

By the light Saltsman saw, too, that Hoskins' face was flushed, his mouth open, and his hands gripping convulsively. His unseeing eyes stared straight up at the deck overhead.

"Bad off," said Saltsman. "Must've fell in a faint, like Tilman did. I'd better call doc."

Shoving aside the chart and navigation books, he lifted the heavy man to the desk and put an oilskin coat under his head. Then he ran out on the bridge again to see if by any chance he had been mistaken in the reading of the compass.

"What's all the excitement?" asked the quartermaster, who had heard the breaking glass. "Did he throw the stuff at you?"

"Mr. Hoskins is bad sick. I'm going after doc. But you're steering the wrong course. It ought to be one hundred and seventy, not two hundred and seventy."

"Must've had a shot too many of your own dope," said the quartermaster calmly. "Fooling with the wild ones in the sick bay must be catching. Go see about Mr. Hoskins and turn off that light you left burning in the chart-room."

"The course is wrong, I tell you," insisted Saltsman, "and it's narrow along here. Change it right away before I go."

"Change nothing, you big boob! What do you think I am, taking orders from a baby whale? Changing the course without proper orders is apt to put a man in jail for the rest of his life, if he's unlucky enough to still have it when the ship hits the beach."

"But it's there in the book," said Saltsman, growing more excited all the time. "I saw it. Hurry, so I can go on and do something for Mr. Hoskins!"

"I go by my orders, bo," said the other firmly. "Brush on by, now. If you're so sure of yourself, wake up the old man and tell him your troubles, but don't tell 'em to me."

"Get away from there," said the big sailor with sudden determination. "You're heading wrong, certain and sure."

He took hold of the wheel, struggling for its possession.

Micky Morton, the quartermaster, was one of the old-timers, squarely built and stocky. He tried to hold the wheel and, with elbows and back, to shake Saltsman off, but, despite all he could do, it went over, spoke by spoke, and very slowly the big ship began to swing around.

"Let go!" said Micky wrathfully and stepped back, swinging a straight blow for Saltsman's face.

The quartermaster's aim was good and there was no attempt to parry. It would have been a knockout for most any one else, but Saltsman only grunted, shook his head, and swept back with one of his big hands, holding the wheel over with the other. The move was unexpected, as the quartermaster had good reason to believe that his blow would put the man out, and in the dark he did not see it coming. He was sent spinning across the bridge.

"You leave me be," said Saltsman without anger. "I know what I'm about."

"Same as all the other nuts from the nut farms," retorted the quartermaster, his head ringing with the mighty cuff.

He collided with the nest of speaking-tubes that went below, and jerked out one of the plugs to whistle for the captain.

"I'll have the Old Man up. Come on over here, Bert," he called to the signal-boy. "Gimme me a hand with this loco hay pitcher. Can't wait for an answer, but the whistle will bring him."

Bert was reluctant.

"Maybe Mr. Hoskins did say one hundred and seventy and not two hundred and seventy," he temporized. "Let's wait for the skipper."

"Wait nothing! This bird's gone wild. He'll pile us up on the beach while the Old Man is getting his boots on. Grab him around the legs while I sink another hot one in his jaw."

"You two let me alone," begged Saltsman. "I don't want to hurt neither one of you, but I'm a-going to hold this here wheel till she reads a hundred and seventy."

The two men advanced, using considerable caution. The *Alta* was swinging sluggishly with left wheel.

* * *

"LIGHT HO!" exclaimed the signalman suddenly.

"Where away?" answered the quartermaster mechanically, wondering what other complication was developing to confuse a situation still far from solution.

"Red light half a point on the starboard bow!" cried the signalman, pointing.

"Schooner or something," said the quartermaster. "No masthead light. We're right on top of her, and she's got all the right of way there ever was! Suffering Pete, what a smash-up! Pull that whistle cord, Bert! Three blasts!"

The quartermaster jumped for the engine-room telegraph, intending to back the engines.

Saltsman was the quicker. He had seen the light, too, and, picking up the grating which smaller helmsmen used to stand on, he jammed it under the wheel to hold it where he wanted, and ran to the telegraph. Micky felt himself picked up bodily, his hand torn from the lever. As he was thrown down the deck, he heard Saltsman's grunt of effort. The pointer still stood at full speed ahead.

Bert, the signal-boy, had reached the wheel, pulled out the grating, and started to revolve the spokes to stop the *Alta's* turn.

"Keep away, buddie," warned Saltsman. "I'm going to do the steering till the captain gets here."

At his command the signal-boy let go promptly. Even with the quartermaster's help he was doubtful of success in subduing the big sailor.

Saltsman took the wheel. The red light was now broad on the starboard bow.

"That'll clear now," he muttered and spun the wheel over, reversed the helm, and began to steady the big ship.

"Green to green and red to red," he muttered to himself, "keep your course and go ahead."

The quartermaster, scrambling back from the wing of the bridge where Saltsman's heave, and a roll of the ship at the same time, had thrown him, came up behind again.

"Don't you know anything, you big farmer?" he shouted. "You've got your green light to the other fellow's red one. Put her over right wheel, quick, before we cut her in two!"

Again he attempted to reach the spokes, but as before Saltsman shook him off. Micky Morton's morale was still good, but the feel of the big sailor's enormous strength had made him wary.

"You're trying to fool me," said Saltsman. "I don't trust you. Red to red the book says, and I learnt it by heart. She's passing, anyhow, whatever it is."

"Yes, I see," said the quartermaster scornfully. "All the real sailors are not dead yet. The skipper of the other craft must have put her about, seeing that whoever was at the wheel here meant to run him down, rules or no rules. Give me that wheel now, you bone-headed pumpkin peeler, and quit this monkey business. Come on, Bert. We've got to manhandle this guy."

The two made another determined but unsuccessful attempt to wrest the wheel from Saltsman. The fight was interrupted in its first stages by the voice of the captain, coming up from below, seeing first the light on the bow, and then the struggling men at the wheel.

"What's going on here? Where is the officer of the watch? What's that light on the bow?"

Quickly he swung his night glasses into position and gave a sharp, quick order—

"Left wheel!"

Micky and Bert fell back at once, and Saltsman obeyed the order promptly. The red light came on the beam, on the quarter, and then showed up astern.

"Ease your helm," ordered the captain. "Steady at eighty for the present. Now tell me what happened."

"Things were all right, sir," answered the quartermaster, "running along as smooth as could be until this fellow came running up here saying we were off the course, and taking the wheel away from me. He said Mr. Hoskins was sick in the chart-room and we ought to be steering one hundred and seventy instead of two hundred and seventy."

"The course is one hundred and seventy," the captain broke in sharply. "It's in the night order book. That red light is on a gas buoy at the end of Barrier Shoals. It's a good thing somebody changed the course. What's the reason I wasn't called sooner?"

"I did call you, sir, as soon as I could get to the tube, but Mr. Hoskins told me plainly that it was two hundred and seventy. Then he went to the chart-room and didn't come back."

"Never mind about that. It's easy to confuse one and two with no one here to check up. Get aft on the run and take a sounding. And you, signal-boy, jump below and break out the doctor. Where is Mr. Hoskins?"

"He's in the chart-room, sir," said Saltsman, "lying on the table."

Then, still holding the wheel, Saltsman told his part of the story in halting, embarrassed sentences.

"You thought the red light was a ship, did you?"

"Yes sir," said Saltsman. "The quartermaster said it was a sailing vessel of some kind because she didn't carry a masthead light. And I made a big mistake, sir, being worried and upset with so many things on my mind. I was thinking our red light was next to that red light, and kept her going straight. If it had been a ship we would have run together. But captain, the boys was pestering me a lot, and pulling at me. I just naturally forgot."

"It's a blessing you did," said the skipper, "and I hardly believe you will ever forget that little point again. This time, if you had read the lights correctly, we should have run straight in across Barrier Shoals instead of outside in deep water. Taking charge as you did saved the ship. I'm going to see that you get a better chance to study navigation. You've got the makings of a real sailorman in you."

This from the captain meant a great deal, and Saltsman knew it. He had been anxious about the outcome of what he had done, and here was praise heaped upon him. He stood seeking words to express his gratitude, but before he could speak the captain went on:

"Here come the others," he said. "Get on below now and see if you can help with Mr. Hoskins."

Ben Hoskins was revived with a whiff of ammonia and carried to his room. The moderate dose of aspirin, given for the headache, had been sufficient to slow up his heart and make him faint, but left no bad after effects. With the usual few days of fever, he began to get well. During his convalescence he laid out a course of study for Saltsman which had the captain's approval. He was quite as grateful as the captain for what the boy had done, for had the *Alta* gone on the reef, he would have been responsible, as it was his watch.

"I'll have you ready to take out a license as soon as you get your discharge," he promised Saltsman and kept his word.

GENTLEMEN OF THE NORTH

A Four-Part Story

Part III

by Hugh Pendexter

Author of "Red Belts," "When Kentucky Starved," etc.

The first part of the story briefly retold in story form.

BLACK CHABOT, manager of the Pembina post of the North West Company, was as fond of "high wine"—alcohol diluted with water—as were the Indians with whom he traded. He was more lavish with the "new milk" than were the other posts, and consequently his Chippewas were usually drunk. Gradually his power was waning, for the Indians had little respect for the white man who got drunk with them. As his clerk, I was the only one at the post who still held their respect, for I never drank. Even Old Tabashaw, their chief, seldom disobeyed me.

It was April in the first year of Black Chabot's management, 1804; new skins were coming in, and the Indians were in an ugly, drunken mood. I realized that they were bent on making trouble.

"We will kill the white men and take their new milk for ourselves."

It was old Tabashaw, the Chippewa Chief, who had spoken, and I knew the threat was not an idle one.

"The Sioux! The Sioux are upon us!"

Black Chabot brought this news. There was nothing that could sober the Chippewas so quickly as this alarm, and only their preparations to defend themselves saved the white men at the post.

Flat Mouth, one of the Chippewas, was the only one I felt I could trust, and so I dispatched him to learn if the Sioux were really upon us. When he returned, it was with the news that the smoke which had caused the alarm had been made by friendly Crees and Assiniboins bringing trade. The danger was past, but the rumor had served its turn; the Chippewas were quiet.

The next day I was dispatched to the X. Y., a rival post, to make an agreement against sending men out to drum up trade. At the N. W. posts on the Reed and on the Scratching, I stoppped to order the managers to be prepared to send their skins down the river. I knew that the brigade would start soon and was happy, for back at headquarters I had determined to ask for transfer—anything to get away from Black Chabot.

Both Desset and Probos, the managers of these two posts, aroused my suspicions. They seemed to be madly hurrying to pack their skins, but the brigade seldom left till June and it was now only April. Desset claimed that his books had been burned by a drunken Indian, and all his accounts destroyed. He seemed, too, to have very few skins, yet the season had been a good one. Then from one of Desset's men I learned that the manager had been sending skins down the river secretly. Desset had secured his post through Black Chabot, so I suspected that all of the managers were involved in a plot to cheat the North West Company.

At the X. Y. I reached an agreement with Red Dearness, the rival manager. There, too, I tried to solve the mystery of Red Dearness' woman, reported by some to be a half-breed. I heard her speak and knew from her talk that she was educated, but I did not see her.

The next morning at the Scratching post, I was dumbfounded to see Black Chabot and the brigade coming down the river, their canoes loaded with skins. Why had they started so early? It was then that the blow fell. Black Chabot ordered me to stay at the Pembina post and take charge during the Summer. I was not to go back to the country of the whites where I had not been in three years. The disappointment was great, but I mastered it and started back to the post while Chabot and Desset set off. On my way I saw that Red Dearness, too, was going down the river with his skins.

Another Sioux scare sent Flat Mouth and myself south of the Pembina to investigate. A detachment of warriors was encountered and Flat Mouth brought back four scalps.

At the post some Crees and Assiniboins came in, but they refused to hunt. I finally found the reason. Their medicine had been stolen. The voice from Rivière Qu'Appelle, the River That Calls, had disappeared. This river, a main fork of the Assiniboin, was regarded with much fear by the Indians of the Northwest. It was supposed to be haunted by a mighty spirit which cried aloud in its flight up and down the course. Such a voice had been heard on the Pembina recently, and the Crees believed it had been stolen by the Chippewas.

Accustomed to Indian superstition, I realized what disastrous results this would have on the morale of my hunters. I promised that the voice should be restored in a month.

THE next day I received a call from Red Dearness' "woman" and, to my surprize, discovered that this woman was the trader's daughter and not a half-breed wife as had been rumored. Her fiery red hair had caused the Indians to give her the name "Medicine Hair" and credit her with supernatural powers.

Her call was a matter of business. She urged me to stop trading rum with the Indians and to my amusement told me she had already discontinued the practise.

She also revealed to me the mystery of the Voice. In her visit to the Pembina she had often sung along that lonely river, and the Indians, hearing this, had believed her voice to be that of the River That Calls.

Before leaving she threatened to use her power over the superstitious Indians to force them to trade skins without rum. I laughed at her, well knowing the power of high wine.

As the days passed, however, my trade fell off alarmingly.

Crazy for rum, one of the X. Y. Indians stole a keg from the N. W. I started out after him, and my quest finally brought me to Miss Dearness. She forced the Indian to return the keg, and so quickly did he do her bidding that I then realized how great was her power over the savages.

"God! But you're a tearing beauty!" said a thick voice.

Miss Dearness and I turned to find that Black Chabot had returned—drunk as usual. He leered at the woman and informed her that he had overtaken the X. Y. brigade down the river, and that her father had died during the trip.

As he reached at Miss Dearness, I knocked him down.

The fight was one-sided, for Black Chabot was very drunk. I finally drove him down the river, swearing that if he ever returned I would kill him.

A few days later I learned that Miss Dearness had gone up the river in search of skins. To my surprize, too, I learned that she had played upon the superstitions of Flat Mouth to force him to accompany her.

Realizing the danger she ran in the Sioux country, I finally resolved to follow. Packing some white buffalo robes, which are considered "big medicine" by all tribes except the Chippewas, I set out alone, leaving Probos in charge.

On the way my worst fears were confirmed. I encountered a hostile Sioux scout. Fearing lest I was already too late, I hastened on up the Red Lake River.

There I found more signs of the enemy. Then, suddenly, the undergrowth parted and I caught a glimpse of disheveled red hair.

The friendly Pillager, Flat Mouth, was close behind. The three of us united and made our way to the river and crossed, only to find a dozen of the enemy awaiting us.

Here, however, the white robes I had brought came into use. Miss Dearness wrapped one around both Flat Mouth and myself. The Sioux, seeing the powerful medicine, hesitated, and we succeeded in gaining shelter in the woods.

There, surrounded by the Sioux, we decided to wait until night. I trusted to my double-barreled gun and their fear of the medicine robes to keep the Indians off till darkness could aid our escape. But there was only one chance in a thousand that we could win free and back-track safely through the long reaches of that wild country.

CHAPTER VII

THE SIOUX RECEIVE REINFORCEMENTS

THIS encouraged us tremendously. Miss Dearness stuck more willow branches around our two forts, while I remained with the chief, who was curiously watching the Indians on the plains. All of the Sioux were now mounted, the horses the Pillager had captured being replaced by those whose owners had fallen. For some minutes the band milled about; then one man rode aside and began haranguing in a loud voice. The Pillager, who had traveled and lived on the Missouri, readily interpreted the speech, which consisted of exhortations for the Sioux to remember they were brave men, that our scalps must go back to their village to wipe out their disgrace in having lost warriors. The white woman was to be taken alive. I was glad Miss Dearness was busy with her willow wands, for the Pillager interpreted word for word, and she understood the Chippewa tongue almost as well as she did English.

When the speechmaker desisted the Sioux swung into a long line, a maneuver beautifully executed. In this formation they came towards us at a walk, tossing up their lances, waving their axes and singing lustily. I made ready with my gun, picking the leader and a man on the left end as my two victims, but Flat Mouth folded his arms and did not even see to it that his bow was taut.

"Make ready!" I nervously advised.

He grunted in disgust. All but half a dozen of the horsemen began to pivot on the left end of their line and, almost before I could understand what they were up to, this huge segment was galloping madly along, parallel to the woods and away from us.

"When night comes we shall ride very swift or very soft," mumbled Flat Mouth, resuming the task of gathering arrows.

In short, the Sioux were perfectly willing we should break from cover and ride south, and left the six men to keep watch on us. But if we attempted to ride north we must pass through the bulk of their band.

Miss Dearness came up to us, and I told her how the Sioux had thrown most of their men to the other side of the grove. She promptly said:

"It doesn't make sense. If they didn't dare attack when all together what good will it do them to divide their forces?"

"They will wait until dusk and creep in from both sides——"

"And be shooting into each other," she shot in.

"Or stay out on the plain and wait for us to try and break through," I concluded.

"But if they don't dare attack in force they must know we can stay here as long as they can stay out there. We can creep to the river and fish. We can make some kind of a raft and cross, or float downstream. We can stay right here and eat our horses. The rivulet furnishes water. And there is a chance that some of our Chippewas may come up the river and give them battle. There's more to it than a waiting campaign. They're anxious to cage us up here until what? Whatever it is the time will be short."

She spoke in English and I translated it to the Pillager. His small eyes sparkled appreciatively and he declared:

"Medicine Hair sees beyond the woods and hill. She can call and send away a voice. She can send her eyes far up the river and over the plain. Look! Tell me what that means!"

He was pointing to the south and at first I could make out nothing. Then I spied it, a thin stream of blue smoke. The girl promptly said in Chippewa:

"The Sioux know help is coming. They will not attack until their friends come. That will be some time before morning. Soon the others will send up a smoke."

The meaning of the smoke was very obvious. Not a half-breed hunter, not a man at any post in our department who could not have read it. Even Probos would have understood. Yet the Pillager, a master at such things, heard her as if she had been an oracle.

"Can the Medicine Hair's eyes, when she calls them back, tell how many Sioux there are at the bottom of that smoke?" he humbly asked.

"As many as were here before you killed any," she calmly replied. Then in English to me: "It's reasonable to believe they belong to the same party and split up in two equal bands. So long as he believes in my *manito*, so much the braver will he be."

The chief began talking to himself in a guttural and almost audible voice and fell to fingering his bow nervously. His emotion was occasioned by the sight of the six warriors out in front. They were beyond arrow range, and only by luck could a ball score any damage.

They began running back and forth, and we saw they were heaping up dry grass. They paid no attention to us, being intent solely on answering the signal.

With a leap the Pillager was on his horse and riding towards them, his bow held with arrow notched. He was not singing now, and as if in a trance the girl and I watched his progress. As the drama of the situation got into our heads we instinctively clasped hands. Back and forth scuttled the Sioux. Forward rode the Pillager. Then one of them chanced to discover him and, with a shout of fear, turned and made for his pony. I saw him go down with a Sioux arrow buried to the feathers in his back.

With screams of rage the others snatched up their weapons, opened fire and then mounted their horses. With a whoop the Pillager charged at them, and they separated in haste to let him pass through, but, when a bit beyond the fallen warrior, he brought his pony round on two hoofs and was making for the timber, swinging very low from the saddle as he rode. For a moment the speed of his mount was checked, then picked up a rattling pace, and the chief was sitting erect, waved something round his head and sounded his terrible scalp-cry.

"By heavens! But that was a coup worth counting!" I fiercely exclaimed.

With a little shudder the girl reminded:

"They could have come through the woods while we stood here. We've been very careless and——"

She ceased abruptly and stared down at our clasped hands.

I was as much surprized as she. Certainly I was no more conscious than she of having taken her hand. It was three years since I had taken a white woman's hand. In no way was the experience displeasing.

"He may need help," she said, releasing

her hand and looking toward the Pillager.

I leaped out in front with my gun, and the warriors behind the Chippewa vanished over the sides of their ponies and swung off to the west. On rushed Flat Mouth, still singing and shouting. But the climax of his arrival was weakened by a puff of smoke from a mound of grass. The signal fire was burning, and the Indians were heaping wet grass and green branches upon it.

Leaving the two to watch the smoke, I hastened to the north side of the grove. Had the enemy but known it he could have massacred the girl and me easily, as we watched the Pillager's sensational exploit. When I came to the end of the growth I noted the Sioux had heard the Chippewa's scalp-yell and were very uneasy. They were riding back and forth, their eyes fixed on the timber, while one of their number was galloping madly toward the tip of the grove to learn what had happened. After watching them for a minute and failing to detect any sign of an advance on our position, I returned to my companions and related what I had observed.

"The name of Eshkebugecoshe fills the Sioux hearts with fear. It makes them old women," loudly boasted the chief.

"It was a big coup," I declared. "You may paint the marks of death and the feet of horses on your body and on your tent to show you killed a man while riding hard."

The chief toned down his vanity on meeting the girl's clear gaze and confessed:

"Eshkebugecoshe is a mighty warrior, but the white woman's medicine helped him. It made the Sioux blind till I could creep very close."

"Couldn't we get across the river? I can swim," eagerly spoke up Miss Dearness.

FLAT MOUTH said it would be foolish to cross before dark, but he suggested that I reconnoiter the river while he watched the Indians. He did not seem to think much of the suggestion, but as it came from the girl he was bound to consider it, probably believing her medicine suggested the plan. I thought very favorably of the idea. The Indians' belief that we planned to use the ponies in attempting to escape would tend to blunt their watch of the river.

I followed the rivulet until I came to its mouth, a bit of a beach grown round with reeds and tall grass. The river rolled brown and silent except for the murmuring of air currents. Mid-stream a huge tree floated with roots upraised, like arms held up in surrender—desolation and solitude. As I watched the water I decided a man could well risk the danger. A long swim under water, timed to take advantage of some of the driftwood ever passing, and the trick could be turned. But the water was icy cold and the danger was not for a woman to run unless absolutely necessary.

Yet at night, with the aid of a log, Miss Dearness could be ferried across. I began to look about for some fallen timber which would serve as a raft. It was while occupied in this task that I received ample proof that the Sioux had not forgotten the river. The proof was an arrow which whizzed by my head and disappeared in the reeds. I drew back among the trees and, cocking my gun, searched the top of the bank. I could see nothing suspicious, yet a savage could remain below the bank with the top of his head masked by the fringe of dead grass. Thus concealed, he could follow my every movement and loose another arrow when I presented a fair target.

The thought made me uncomfortable, and I retreated deeper into the grove. A mocking yell told me that my flight had been witnessed, and, incensed, I turned back, determined to get a shot at him. The rascal was too cunning in his hiding, so, returning to my companions, I reported the incident.

Flat Mouth slipped out of his white robes and without a word stole to the river to match his woodcraft against the sentinel's. As he had reported that the Sioux on the north side of the timber were quiet, and as no danger could take the girl unaware from the south side, I surrendered to my desire and followed him.

Armed only with his bow and arrow he slipped through the growth with the softness of a lynx, following my trail along the rivulet. Keeping well back, I watched him. He was studying my tracks rather than looking about for the enemy. He halted a short distance from where I had stood in the open when the arrow missed me, then glided to the edge of the reeds and, bending low, pulled an arrow from the muck. As he straightened I saw his arm twitch and a red blotch appear on the biceps. Leaping to one side, he fitted the arrow to his bow, gave a keen, sweeping glance overhead and discharged the arrow. Almost with the twang of the bow there came the shrill death-cry from the sentinel and I saw a dark body bump down along the trunk of an oak and lodge against one of its branches.

Gliding back to me, the Pillager announced:

"Sometime I will climb up and get his hair. The arrow in the mud showed that it came from overhead and not from the bank."

With this explanation he registered the kill with his terrible war-cry.

We hastened back through the grove, the Pillager swinging to the north to reconnoiter, while I made direct for Miss Dearness. She had heard the two cries, one of death and one of victory, and stood facing the river, her hands twisted together, her face white and drawn. On beholding me she hastily turned toward the plain and her hands fell listlessly to her side.

The column of smoke had replied to the message from the south and was now dying out. She informed that while I had been gone the Indians had used their robes to confine the smoke and then released it in puffs. Had the Pillager witnessed it he could have read the code. However it was not difficult to guess the message; it told those in the south to hasten if they would be in at a triple kill.

Until now I had had no chance to exchange more than a few words with Miss Dearness. She gestured for me to sit beside her on the robes, and I took the opportunity to say:

"You should have started back East the minute you heard your father was dead."

"I told him I would stay till some one came to take his place."

"But it's no place for a white woman," I protested. "It's bad enough for a man to be cast away among these savages."

She smiled faintly and reminded—

"The only danger I've faced—until today—was from a white man, Black Chabot."

"I wish the Robe had hit him with his arrows."

"I told the Robe to be very careful and not hit him, the drunken beast!"

"If we could only get word to my Chippewas," I sighed.

"It would do no good so long as I am with you," she discouraged. Then with a grim little laugh: "I'm bad luck. If you were alone they would come; but not while I'm with you. They believe I stole the voice from the Qu' Appelle or that my medicine wasn't strong enough to keep it. If I hadn't sent the voice back they would dare anything to help me."

"Then the Crees and Assiniboins?"

"They've heard the Chippewas tell that my medicine is weak. Now they believe I would have kept the Voice if I could. They feel no gratitude. It would be as dangerous for me to meet Cree or Assiniboin away from the post as it has been to meet the Sioux."

"Nonsense!" I scoffed. "They're afraid of you, even if they don't like your medicine."

"They hate me and they don't fear me. When I went on the river alone at night and sang to forget my loneliness I little knew what I was stirring up. I went to get away from the drinking and fighting. I sang, as I was always singing back in the East."

"But the Assiniboins would listen to me," I proudly insisted.

"Mr. Franklin, you don't know them. You've met those that come to your post. Their territory extends far to the west. They're a mighty people. You've met men from one band only. Meet them away from your fort and your rum and you will find they're very much savages."

A HORSEMAN suddenly darted toward us, his bow drawn, seeking to learn if we were keeping watch. I covered his bobbing figure as best I could and held my fire until he should come within decent range. Just as I began to hope, he pulled his pony about and scuttled back to his mates.

"Who are you? Where were you born?" I asked, lowering my gun.

"English—England," she murmured, her gaze wandering far beyond the wild horizon.

"And I'm an American. Flat Mouth thinks your hair is medicine."

With a little frown she gathered up the disheveled mass and, before my eyes, performed the miracle of restoring her hair to glossy smoothness by the simple process of patting, twisting and poking. Stay out in the Northwest for three seasons and you will appreciate how keenly this simple task appeals to a white man.

She faced me suddenly, her blue eyes prying deep into mine, and abruptly asked—

"Why do you look at me like that?"

"Like what?" I defended.

"As if you had never seen a woman before."

"I haven't seen a white woman for three seasons," I sighed.

"I understand." And she turned to resume her watch of the Indians.

"A white woman even if she be as ignorant and unattractive as a scullery maid would seem a goddess to you now."

"Scarcely that," I demurred. "Three years out here is a long time, but not an eternity. I never dream of scullery maids. I——"

Her grave reproachful gaze caused me to shift and ask—

"You'll be willing to start back east after you get out of this?"

"When my successor comes. The X. Y. people allow nothing to interfere with the interests of the company."

"Except rum," I reminded.

"That was my whim. The company will disapprove. My defense will be that the drinking made it dangerous for me. They will let it go at that. The companies know liquor is bad for the trade. If it weren't for competition they wouldn't use it. It isn't sound business. You must depend entirely upon the Indians to get furs into the posts. The richest fur country in the world would be worthless unless you had Indians to work it. Then where is the sense in killing off your workmen with rum? Every drinking match means so many wounded and usually one or more dead. It's bad enough when the quarrels are kept within one tribe, but let a Chippewa stab a Cree, or a Cree an Assiniboin, and you have a season of war between the two tribes, and no trade. Except when fighting an opposition the Hudson's Bay Company is very careful about giving out liquor. So would the X. Y. and the N. W. be if either could have all the trade."

"If the N. W. and the opposition posts should shut down on rum tomorrow you'd find these Indians hunting for some free trader to give rum for their goods. They will travel any distance to get new 'milk.' They will have rum and we must have the furs. There is no other way."

"Oh yes, there is," she murmured. "Give one company a monopoly of the trade, and the furs will come in and no rum will go out."

"But which company? The N. W.? Then I agree with all my heart."

"The companies should combine into one. No company would refuse if it knew a monopoly was to be granted."

She became silent and I was satisfied to study her profile. During the stress of fighting and retreating I had defended her from a sense of duty. The puzzling and disturbing emotions which had driven me up the river to find her had abated. From the moment we met in the woods, and I learned my work was cut out for me she became quite impersonal, something to be saved. The Pillager placed her on a pedestal and looked on her as mighty medicine because of her hair.

Now that I took time to study her she became a personality again, to be protected differently than one protects a pack of beaver. This knowledge was borne in upon me after I had decided she was very tired. Weariness suggests weakness. The strain had told on her and this fact humanized her. I began to pity her. I was guilty of feeling glad she was weary, for it proved that she was no superwoman.

I arranged a robe at the foot of an oak between two huge roots and asked her to lie there and rest. At first she dismissed the suggestion with an impatient shake of the head, then abruptly changed her mind and made herself comfortable. I remained behind the bushes watching the enemy. Inside of five minutes her deep and regular breathing told me she was asleep.

I turned and looked at her and found the masculine resolution which had characterized her face was replaced by womanliness. She held a new interest for me, and I wondered if, when back east, she was not always like this, relaxed and soft and winsome. She was half reclining, half sitting, with her head and shoulders against the oak, and as I gazed, her head sank to one side and I feared she would lean too far and lose her balance. I sat beside her, and her head rested on my shoulder.

Thus we sat while the sun sped along on its eternal errand. Thus we sat when a Sioux vidette galloped slowly toward the grove with the intention of counting coup by coming very close. Through the lace work of willow branches I could see the scoundrel plainly, although remaining unseen by him.

As the girl had her head pillowed on my right shoulder I raised my gun with my left hand. Even when thus handicapped I knew I could pot him if he should come up a bit closer. He wavered, almost halted and stabbed his suspicious glances up and down the front of our shelter, then directed his horse well within easy range. I had him, only the explosion of the piece would have startled the girl. I held my fire. Something suddenly alarmed him, and he yanked his pony about and rode frantically back to his mates. Arrows began pursuing him, three in the air at a time, and I knew the Pillager was back from his trip of discovery. The arrows did no damage, and the man escaped.

Then the Pillager burst through the undergrowth, his face distorted with fear. On beholding us he grunted in deep disgust, yet looked much relieved. Finding the savage so close without any action on my part, he assumed we had been butchered. The girl stirred and opened her blue eyes. For a few moments she remained with her head on my shoulder, her eyes slightly dazed as sleep still lingered. Then a red tide spread to her neck and she drew back against the tree trunk.

"You could have killed him!" Flat Mouth was accusing.

"The range was long," I protested.

"You could have killed him," insisted the chief. "The Medicine Hair slept on your shoulder, or we would have now one more dead Sioux."

The girl understood. Her manner was gentle as she asked—

"You didn't fire because of me?"

"You were sleeping nicely. You needed rest. Tonight will be very hard on you. Besides, the chief is mistaken. The warrior was too far away."

Flat Mouth easily followed my disclaimer and with a grunt cried:

"Let the Medicine Hair see how far away the Sioux dog was."

Before I could stop him he was running out on the plain. The horsemen pranced about, undecided whether to drive him back or await developments. Possibly they believed he was insane. He stopped, stuck an arrow into the earth and loudly called:

"Here, white woman, is where the dog turned his horse. Is it long range?"

"Almost an easy pistol-shot," she murmured. "You shouldn't have minded me."

"But I do mind you," I assured. "Besides, one more dead won't save us. Others will be arriving before night. Shooting won't get us clear. We must depend on the darkness."

"You think we can break through?" she wistfully asked.

"We will sneak through," I answered, renewing my pity for her as I more fully realized how she had stood face to face with death ever since discovered by the Sioux.

The Pillager and I had the stimulus of battle to hold us up to the mark. She must await the verdict and, if it be adverse, kill herself or die a thousand deaths.

"I suppose it depends on whether the Sioux up the river arrive before or after dark," she murmured.

"It will be dark before they arrive," I comforted.

I was horribly afraid. The Sioux would make all haste on reading the smoke which told of three victims—one a woman—awaiting capture. I believed they would arrive before night. Did they do this we must stand an attack in force and go down fighting. I prayed for a storm to spoil their bow-strings and leave my gun master of the situation, but the wind continued strong from the south, and there was no hint of rain in the sky.

Had it been a case of the Pillager and myself we would have taken to the river, trusting to reach the opposite bank and find a hiding place in the thickly timbered country. By separating, one of us would stand some chance of escaping. Together with the girl it would be a miracle if we could conceal ourselves even if we reached the other bank of the river. Only a black night would reduce the advantage of mere numbers.

FLAT MOUTH came up to us, turned on his heel and retired into the timber. I endeavored to engage him in conversation but he would not talk. The girl said his silence meant he had lost hope, that he believed the enemy would receive reinforcements before night. I insisted he was still angry because I had not shot at the Sioux while she slept on my shoulder. Then we sat side by side, trying to conceal from each other our anxiety, as we watched the sun and kept an eye on the few Indians. They too seemed more interested in the upper reaches of the Red than in us. Like ourselves they were watching for the coming of their tribesmen.

The sun was all but lost behind the western rim, and the long shadows cast by the Indians in front of us would soon fade with the twilight. Now the race between the red scoundrels and the sun was almost run, my heart began jumping most erratically. The girl seemed lost in a reverie, so I left her to see what was going on north of the timber.

The Indians were dismounted and stretched across the plain to prevent our making a break. There were no shadows now, and the light had perceptibly dimmed. I knew how quickly the light fled in these vast areas of loneliness, once the sun gave up the fight. Only a few minutes more and we would hope for the best. A warrior sprang to his feet and stared toward the river. I believed he had glimpsed the Pillager. He said something, and other warriors stood up, one even standing on his horse.

Then came a high pitched call from the river. With an extravagant display of joy they answered the call, sprang to their ponies and began riding back and forth. From the other side of the timber came a yelping chorus.

"Mr. Franklin! Mr. Franklin!" called the bell-like voice of Miss Dearness.

I ran back, much alarmed, and found she had come as far as the rivulet in search of me.

"They're coming!" she said.

I raced to the edge of the woods and beheld them, riding far apart, waving their weapons and shouting their war-songs as they slowly cantered towards us. Dropping on one knee, I covered the man riding in advance of the line whose elaborate head-dress marked him as the bearer of the pipe on this expedition. I sent a ball through his chest most neatly, and as his spirit fled to the land of many lodges his followers came to a confused halt. I fired again, this time knocking a man half round in his saddle but not dismounting him. Instantly the survivors scurried back. As I was reloading Flat Mouth came through the bushes and motioned for me to follow him. I hesitated to leave the girl, but she urged:

"Go! They've learned their lesson. They'll keep back."

Flat Mouth hurried diagonally across the timber and emerged on the lower edge near the river. Drawing me down beside him, he pointed to the east bank and grunted—

"Sioux!"

"I heard their signal," I informed him.

"They came down the river on the other side. When it gets very dark they will bring their horses over. They heard your gun and they don't want to try it just now."

"When they cross we can not break through," I said.

"We will all be killed if we stay in the woods. You must stop them from crossing their horses for a little while. The Sioux on this side feel sure of a coup. They will not fight till their friends join them. Stay here till it gets too dark to shoot. I will take Medicine Hair and the horses to the end of the timber. When they attack on both sides we must ride after the sun."

"West?"

"It leads from home but it is the nearest way there. We can strike the Cheyenne near the Lac du Diable country. There are many good hiding places there."

The bushes across the river swayed and a painted face showed through the dusk as one of the newcomers stood up to signal the horsemen on our side. Knowing I could not begin too soon to teach them their place, I rested the gun on Flat Mouth's shoulder, aimed a bit high and had the satisfaction of seeing the brave go sprawling down the bank, his head and shoulders remaining under water. This kill wrung a chorus of devilish yells from the hidden warriors. Flat Mouth hurled his war-cry at them and danced in great glee.

I reloaded and urged the Pillager to return to the girl and prepare her for making the tip of the grove. Reluctantly he left me, swinging to the north to take a final look at the horsemen there, and I settled down to waiting.

Objects began to fade out of my vision. Trees near by became blurred and unreal.

I knew our supreme effort could not be long delayed. The surface of the water became a black waste, and I thought I heard a faint splash opposite my position. Now voices began calling loudly farther down the river. The newcomers had gone to find a crossing. I could see no reason why I should not put after the chief and the girl; then the soft splashing was repeated, this time nearer.

Quitting the bushes, I crawled through the mud to the edge of the bank and heard a rippling sound that was not made by the *lap-lap* of the water on the narrow beach. Suddenly a vague shape stood before me, within twenty feet, and I fired. He did not have time to utter his death cry before slumping back into the current. Trailing my gun, I ducked into the woods and followed up the rivulet.

The Pillager and Miss Dearness were about half-way to the end of the timber when I overtook them. It seems she had refused to go further until I joined them.

"Take her and go on," viciously directed Flat Mouth, thrusting the bridles of the three horses into my hands.

"No time for you to count a coup," I warned as he turned back.

"Very soon I shall be at your heels," he promised.

Our progress was slow because of the difficulty in avoiding the frequent clumps of willows. From the plain on the north came the sound of much singing. From the south the Indians were racing their horses impudently near the woods and yelling derisively. I gave the girl the bridles to hold while I recharged my gun. We had nearly reached the end of our cover, and the underbrush was thinning out, when the girl caught my hand and whispered—

"They're trying to burn us out!"

I sniffed and detected smoke, a thin reek of burning grass. I wet my finger and tested the faint breeze. It still held from the south. Creeping to the edge of the plain I could make out moving shapes as the Indians rode up and down the front of the timber. But there were no fires burning on this side, and a blaze lighted on the north would sweep away from us.

Returning to Miss Dearness, I reassured her.

"Then there is only one other explanation," she said. "Flat Mouth has set the grass afire on the north side of us."

"It will burn to the Turtle, perhaps to the Park."

"Some one is coming!" she warned, and again her hand instinctively closed over mine.

I cocked the gun and rested it over a saddle, not bothering to release my hand.

"It is Eshkebugecoshe," softly called a voice.

The girl dropped my hand hurriedly.

Without pausing, Flat Mouth took charge of the horses and pressed ahead while I guarded the rear. Now the smoke was very noticeable and our animals showed a tendency to bolt.

"You fired the grass?" I whispered.

"In many places," he grunted. "The Sioux are spreading out and watching for us to ride through under cover of the smoke. The warriors on the other side will think we're escaping and will ride into the woods."

We were at the end of the timber, and the girl mounted her pony and adjusted her white robe.

Dead ahead sounded the pounding of hoofs and an Indian screamed something. Flat Mouth interpreted:

"He says for the men to ride through the woods, some to go to the river, some to come up here, some to follow the fire and see if we are there, some to keep in front of it. Wait for me here and do not fire the gun unless you have to."

Before we could restrain him he was galloping toward the messenger, his white robe making him resemble a Sioux warrior whose skins were white with clay. I heard him salute the Sioux in that tongue. The other asked something in a sharp, insistent voice. The next moment there was the blurr of a struggle, then the *clump* of a falling body. A horseman was riding toward me. I cocked my piece, but Flat Mouth softly commanded:

"Hurry! Hurry!"

Then he took the girl's pony by the halter and led the way out into the plain.

CHAPTER VIII

WE MEET BLACK CAT'S PEOPLE

ON OUR left the warriors were entering the woods. On our right they were riding their ponies through the fire to find us behind the smoke. Had it been Autumn there would have been no passing the flames, but with the short stubble sprinkled with the new grass trying to gain the sun, and with the ground still wet, there was no danger. The smoke, the night and the shouting brought much confusion to the enemy. Away from it all we rode, the girl and the Pillager in advance, and I scampering behind with my two barrels ready.

Our escape must have been quickly discovered, as we had not traveled more than two miles before we heard shouting to the north and abreast of us. We slowed our animals to a walk, our course tending a bit south of west and which, if persisted in, would bring us to the Cheyenne River. The Sioux knew we were somewhere south of them and were concentrating all their efforts in throwing a barrier across the plains to prevent our turning north towards the Pembina.

I rode up beside the girl. She reached out, patted my arm and said—

"I've made you a lot of bother."

"Life out here is made up of bothers. I'm glad to find one that's worth while."

"You say it very nicely," she approved. "But I won't be a bother to any one again if I can get out of this. So long as I could manage without being helped it was my place to stay. Now that I find I have to shift my responsibilities I am anxious to go back east. I never had believed it, but I do now; a woman is sure to need help sometime."

"She wouldn't be a woman if she didn't," I declared. "Even men expect to help each other in this country."

"He doesn't have to ask another to see to it he isn't taken prisoner," she gravely replied. "I had no right to ask you. Another example of dodging responsibilities."

"God forbid it should ever have to be!"

"But you wouldn't let them take me alive?" she fiercely demanded.

"No man would," I answered.

Again she patted my arm and murmured—

"If we had met back East we might have been such friends."

The wind whipped a strand of her hair across my face, and in that moment she was all feminine—dependent, and her presence became a tonic. I was saved from replying to her last speech—a foolish speech, as there was nothing to prevent our being "such friends" out here—by a warning hiss from the Pillager.

He leaped to the ground and ordered us to do likewise. I helped the girl to dismount, and the chief caught her pony by the nose to keep him from giving an alarm, while I muzzled my own beast and waited. A thudding of hoofs, not more than four men, as the Pillager whispered, drew nearer. They were bearing directly down on us, and I was anxious to release my animal and make ready to fire. Flat Mouth warned:

"Be still! See that the horse doesn't call out. They can't see us."

I knew this must be true, as we could see nothing of them. On they came and raced by in front of us and very close—a suggestion of motion as if something had disturbed the darkness and left a swirl of darkness behind it. These were spies sent out to learn our true position. Above us on the right the enemy kept calling back and forth as they patrolled from east to west. Still on foot, we resumed our flight, the chief picking his course without any hesitation. I suggested the necessity of a turning movement before daylight, but he discouraged it, saying:

"We must keep this way till light. Then we must hide. This is a big war-party. It will be ashamed to go back and face the women without scalps to pay for the braves we have killed. These are the Sioux of the plains, very cruel and fierce. Once they held the country along the lower Red River. They are always at war with the Chippewas."

"For just where are we striking?"

"The bend of the Cheyenne. It is very rough and heavily wooded along the river. The Sioux claim the country. We can hide there a few days and then go home."

From what he said I judged the distance to be covered was about forty miles. I know that we rode and walked all night long with the Sioux hovering to the north of us during much of the journey. When the east began lighting its fires, and we were permitted to see the plain around us, I was delighted by two discoveries; the plain was empty of Indians, and a short distance ahead a thick growth marked the course of the Cheyenne where it made its northern loop.

The girl swayed in her saddle, and I rode closer to her.

"I was asleep," she drowsily murmured, leaning against my arm. "Dreamed the

Indians had captured me, that you came."

Again her head dropped, and it was a long time before I learned of the heroics I played in that particular dream.

Flat Mouth led the way into the growth, going ahead to make sure no grizzlies were waiting to pounce upon our horses. After securely hobbling the animals so they could not escape, he disappeared in the direction of the river which flowed unseen near-by. I spread out the skin and three of the robes and induced the girl to lie down. Then I placed the remaining robes over her to keep out the morning chill and promised to call her for breakfast.

Searching the edge of the growth, I collected an armful of dry sticks which I knew would not smoke, and by the time I had done this Flat Mouth appeared with several wild geese. He attended to the cooking, making a fire so small as to seem ridiculous to a white man. As he broiled the fowl he told me the trees were ripped and seamed by bears' claws and that both banks of the river must be teeming with the animals. I had nothing but contempt for the black and brown varieties, knowing them to be harmless, but the grizzly was a different proposition. Flat Mouth insisted, however, that these seldom attacked unless cornered or wounded.

The girl woke up, and, after she had eaten, the chief and I stuffed ourselves. Then he insisted that we try to get some sleep. The sun was half-way through its day's work when I opened my eyes. The girl was seated with her back to a tree, her hair a marvel of neatness. She had thrown a robe over me, and this little act, so meaningless to those never initiated into the wilds, affected me strangely. It was the first time in many years that any one had taken thought for my comfort; certainly the first wherein a woman had given me any attention since I was a child in the States and under my mother's care. My first sensation was that of being "mothered." I liked it. All men do, let them disclaim to the contrary as they will.

I half closed my eyes and for several minutes pretended to be asleep, that I might watch her. Her blue eyes were serene; her fine features were softened by repose. Here, in a position of great danger, she impressed me as revealing her true self, her genuine womanliness. At the X. Y. post, where no physical harm could intrude, she had been cold, hard and unapproachable.

At last she caught me spying and colored furiously, instinctively feeling of her hair.

"Where is the chief?" I innocently asked.

She pointed, and I arose and beheld him sleeping, lying on his face. When I stepped toward him he came to his senses and sprang to his feet like a wildcat. Our voices had not disturbed him but my step had. Subconsciously, perhaps, he had catalogued our voices, but a stealthy step was not so easily classified. He always insisted a person woke up more easily and more completely—woke up all over as he expressed it—if he slept on his face. The girl insisted that he finish out his nap, but he replied he was "filled" with sleep and would need no more till another day.

The girl said that during our slumbers there had been no signs of life on the plain except the buffalo and their lurking escort of gray wolves. She had heard sounds back in the woods, and once a red deer had poked his head through the bushes to look us over.

I went with Flat Mouth to the river, where he fashioned several drinking-dishes out of bark, and while there we saw seven grizzlies descend the opposite shore to drink. They were huge brutes and more to be feared than the Sioux, should they take a notion to attack. The Pillager observed them unconcernedly, however, assuring me that they would not bother us if we did not trouble them.

The river, he reminded, was seldom visited by Assiniboin, Cree or Chippewa because the Sioux claimed it. From fear of attacks from the northern Indians, the Sioux, in turn, seldom came there except in war strength. So all animal life had been left to develop undisturbed by man. The bears had not been hunted and did not know man as a destroyer. This was all very comforting as long as I could believe it, but the thought of the girl back in the little glade alone, with these monsters wandering about in batches of seven, made me anxious to return.

We took water to her and on the way started up red deer which were nowhere near as shy as those on the Red River. Leaving her again, we visited the horses and found them contentedly grazing inside the fringe of bushes and willows. Leaving the chief with them, I rejoined the girl.

"MUST we wait until night before starting home?" she eagerly asked.

"I believe that is the chief's idea. He knows the country and the Indians far better than we do. We must take no foolish risks."

"If you were alone would you start now?" she asked.

In truth I should have, but I said nothing.

"Then pretend I'm a man. Let's go at once," she cried with a show of impatience, and she stood and began gathering up the robes.

My imagination was incapable of detecting anything masculine in her splendid womanhood. I could not suppress a small smile at her suggestion. Instantly she was the woman of the X. Y. post and was commanding:

"Call the Indian! Tell him we start at once."

Flat Mouth appeared on the scene before I could remonstrate with her. In Chippewa she repeated to him her intention of starting for the Red River. He shook his head, saying—

"We must stay here a little longer."

"You two can stay. I will go alone. The country is perfectly safe. The Sioux have lost the trail entirely."

I have no doubt she would have taken a pony and set forth if I had not stopped her, saying:

"You can't go alone. We'll take orders from the Pillager."

"I'll take orders from no one," she haughtily informed. "I suppose I may have one of the horses, seeing that they belonged to the Sioux?"

"No."

"Very well, I can make it afoot," she calmly said.

"What's the matter with you?" I angrily inquired. "Can't you reason? Or is it your temper?"

I thought she was trying to annihilate me with her furious gaze. By an effort she mastered herself and quietly retorted:

"My temper is nothing to you. We're thrown together by a series of mishaps. I appreciate your coming to find me, but if your coming makes you feel any responsibility for my acts I'm sorry you came."

"The Lord forbid I should ever have to be responsible for such a bundle of spite as you seem to be," I peevishly protested.

She smiled with her lips, turned and walked towards the plain. I caught up with her and demanded—

"What do you plan?"

"I'm on my way to the X. Y. post," she lazily informed.

"Unless you return to cover at once the Pillager and I will tie you."

"You would never dare!" she gritted, turning on me like a cat.

All my silly resentment dropped from me, and I gently explained:

"Miss Dearness I should never dare to look a man, red or white, in the face if I allowed you to start alone for the Red. I won't threaten again to tie you, but if you start for the Red I'll go with you. It's hardly fair to let the Pillager go with us as he is of a different race."

She fought the battle with herself, her red hair being a true gage of her temper. Suddenly she surrendered, murmuring:

"I was wrong. We'll go back to the chief."

"You're tired. Your nerves are out of tune. In a few hours it will be night; then we can go."

"It isn't my nerves," she contritely corrected. "It's just temper."

"My temper is off the key. Of course I spoke foolishly when I said I would tie you."

"I'll obey orders."

Flat Mouth had watched us without a lineament of his strong face betraying that he could either see or hear. When we joined him he gave her a quick look and walked towards the horses. She remained silent, not inclined to talk. I waited some minutes to see if she desired companionship, then went after the Pillager.

The chief was crouching behind some cherry trees and had, I observed, shifted the horses deeper into the growth. He was staring intently out on the plain. He motioned for me to drop beside him. My heart gave a thump, for I had been so positive we had shaken the Sioux off our trail that this hint of their presence weakened me for a moment.

"Assiniboins," he said.

"Where?" I demanded. He pointed to the northern rim and by much staring through half-closed lids I managed to make out some dots.

"Buffaloes," I decided.

"Assiniboins," he repeated.

"Then they're friendly. They won't

do anything worse than try to steal our horses."

"They've killed traders when catching them alone. These are not of the same band that comes to the Pembina."

"All the Assiniboins are good robe-makers. They're all friendly with the whites," I persisted.

"These are not any Red River band. If they see us they will do their best to kill us and take our horses. I am an Indian. I tell you I know this."

As a trader I had had experience only with straggling bands of the tribe. It was hard for me to believe that I had anything to fear from a people who begged rum rations from me and who went and came when I gave the word. My incredulity must have been obvious, for the chief hissed out—

"Do you think Eshkebugecoshe is afraid?"

No, he was not afraid. He had lived with Mandans and had fought with them and their allies, the Crows, against these same Assiniboins and the Sioux. The tribe had taken to horses, being a migratory people and forever chasing the buffalo, and horses they must have. That they would appropriate ours if they got the chance went without saying, but I had supposed the theft would be committed with stealth and in no event be accompanied with violence.

"Say what is to be done and we will do it," I agreed.

"We will wait until they go. If they come down here we will follow up the river," he replied. Then very significantly—"They must not see the white woman."

"She was big medicine to them once," I reminded.

"To those who came to the Pembina. But the Voice is back on the River That Calls, and this band would kill her to prevent it being stolen again."

I remembered what the girl had told me, much to the same effect, and if Flat Mouth was not afraid, I was.

Yet I still hoped and half believed the dark objects were buffaloes. At so great a distance it is impossible to detect any but the most rapid motion. A horse galloping at full speed will scarcely appear to be moving. So far as the dots were concerned, they appeared to be stationary. We rose to go back to the camp, and I was debating whether it was necessary to inform Miss Dearness of this possible new peril, when the Pillager gave a sharp yelp and went bounding through the bush as if the devil were nipping his heels. Believing the girl was in some danger, I charged after him. When I entered the glade he was furiously stamping out a little fire. Miss Dearness stood at one side anxiously watching him.

"What have I done now?" she whispered to me.

"Nothing," I warmly assured, scowling at the Pillager.

"Green bark!" he grunted and, tilting his head, he pointed upward. Even with the fire extinguished there was a pale haze floating clear of the tree tops.

I belittled it, saying—

"An eagle couldn't see that, Eshkebugecoshe."

"They have sacrificed dogs to their *manito*, Their medicine is strong," he gloomily retorted.

"What's the matter, Mr. Franklin? Are the Sioux near?" cried Miss Dearness.

"Not a Sioux in sight. The Pillager and I disagree about some dots out on the plain. He says they're Assiniboins. I say they are buffaloes."

"And he fears they saw the smoke," she cried, wringing her hands. "Now I've brought new danger on you two by my thoughtlessness. It was so dreary waiting. I forgot myself. I threw some green bark on the hot ashes to see it curl up—it burst into flame—then I fed on some green sticks—I bring bad luck."

"Nonsense," I sharply replied. "Is it surprizing that a band of thieving Indians should stumble upon us here? They will stand clear of my gun. It's stood off their betters."

I turned to Flat Mouth and boasted the same to him.

He shook his head energetically:

"It's no medicine to the Assiniboins, the Crees or the Chippewas. They have seen it and its two barrels, and the truth has gone through the three tribes. They are two shots afraid; that is all. Soon the Sioux of the plains will know about it. Then it won't be medicine to them."

THE RAN back to watch the dots, and Miss Dearness and I followed him. Now they were no longer dots but mounted men. They had drawn near enough for us to be sure of this, and yet they strangely resembled buffaloes. It was not until a line of them raced parallel to our hiding place that I discovered the cause for my fancy. Each warrior wore on his head a covering of buffalo hide to which were fixed two horns. In some cases this strange head-gear comprised the whole head of the creature, the skull bones having been carefully removed, and the skin worn as a hood.

They seemed to be racing about aimlessly, and I rejoiced to the Pillager—

"They didn't see the smoke."

"It was such a tiny smoke they couldn't," added Miss Dearness.

The Pillager's answer was a silent drama. Without a word he reached over his shoulder and pulled arrows from his quiver. Without removing his gaze from the swiftly maneuvering horsemen he placed the arrows before him in a row, then caught up his bow and drew the cord taut. Miss Dearness glanced at me with a little frown worrying her forehead.

"They think we're here?" I asked Flat Mouth.

"They know it," he tersely responded.

To my way of thinking the horsemen were not acting suspiciously. One of them, the leader, whirled a disk of rawhide from the point of his lance and the riders raced to where it fell, jabbing and spearing until one managed to pick it up. He, in turn, carried it triumphantly aloft until hard pressed, when he sent it sailing from him, and again the mad scramble to obtain it.

I doubted the Pillager's bald assertion until I noted that the rawhide was always being sent in our direction. Each rush brought the band closer. Now the chief had the piece of hide and his men were strung out behind him in undulating loops like the letter S greatly prolonged. My eyes were distracted by the constantly shifting loops. Yet the leader, with each maneuver, brought them nearer to the woods.

"They're coming!" I softly warned as the first loop suddenly swung far forward so as to line up fully thirty warriors riding abreast with their chief on their left.

"Fire the gun and get back to the horses!" ordered Flat Mouth, snatching up an arrow.

With a terrific shout the whole band came toward us. I fired both barrels into the front rank, and a miss was impossible. Flat Mouth's bow began to twang, and his arrows streamed into the center of the assault.

"Get to the horses!" he cried and then raised a war-cry.

It was not the Pillager's yell, but the cry of the Sioux, and faster and faster flew the arrows. I seized the girl's wrist and urged her to the camp. I had barely slipped the hobbles and gathered up the halter ropes when Flat Mouth came gliding to us, his face exalted with the lust of battle against great odds. Without a word he took his horse and began leading the way along a deer-path that led upstream. The girl rode behind him, and I, on foot, brought up the rear.

I managed to reload one barrel and, as nothing happened, I halted and charged the other. The way was rough and at every rod we read the signs of much game. Little piles of hair at the foot of trees whose bark was worn smooth showed that the buffaloes penetrated the thickets in considerable numbers. Signs of bears were the most plentiful, however. It was a pelt-hunter's paradise if he could gather the toll without losing his scalp.

After an hour of continuous travel the Pillager halted and briefly explained:

"They didn't dare to enter the woods at first, thinking the Sioux were there. My Sioux war-cry and the Sioux arrows fooled them. They'll soon find out their mistake. Their men are creeping in now; soon they'll see where only two men and a woman camped. Soon they will come fast."

"What shall we do now?" asked Miss Dearness.

"Cross the river and strike for the Mandan villages on the Missouri," was the astounding answer.

I gasped aloud in dismay. Leave the post with only foolish Probos on duty, with old Tabashaw having free rein to intimidate, to bully, and to consume the company's rum! Run to the Missouri to escape while home was so near?

"It must be so," growled the chief, guessing my reluctance. "Only in that way can we save the white woman."

"To the Mandan villages it is, then," I agreed.

"I'm willing to risk turning back," spoke up Miss Dearness.

"Eshkebugecoshe is not willing," grimly

retorted the chief. "I killed some of them, and the gun killed some. When they see how they were tricked only one torture will satisfy them. Wait while I look at the river."

He glided down the rough and heavily timbered bank. While he was gone I strained my eyes, seeing an enemy in every bush and stump. At last he returned and, without speaking, led his pony down the slope. I estimated our position to be directly south of the Lac du Diable country and I knew, from talks with the post Indians, that the river woods we were now traversing thinned out into scattering willows a few miles farther west.

The river was once occupied by the Cheyennes who served as a barrier between the Sioux and the Chippewas, being neutral to both. More than half a century before, the Chippewas, a very jealous people by nature, got the idea the neutrals were favoring the Sioux in trade. While returning from an unsuccessful expedition, a war-party of Chippewas fell on a Cheyenne village and killed many. The Cheyennes promptly migrated across the Missouri, and since then the red shadow of the Sioux has hung over the Chippewas, with no neutral nation between to minimize the shock of an attack.

The crossing was not difficult and we made it easily and surmounted the opposite bank, but left a trail a bull buffalo could read. Flat Mouth held up his hand for silence and cocked his ear. I heard nothing beyond the usual noise of wood life.

"They're following our trail," he warned. "If we stick to the woods they will overtake us. Our only chance is to take to the open now and ride for it. Our horses are fresh, theirs are tired. Once on the plain, we can leave them."

"But they'll chase us?" asked the girl.

He nodded and, to cheer her up, added:

"We shall find some Mandans, or some of the Big Bellies (Minnetarees) hunting buffalo. They will help us."

We broke through the timber and started for the southwest at a gallop. We had gone not more than a fourth of a mile when a ringing cry sounded behind us. Glancing back, I beheld a warrior dancing and waving his arms at the edge of the timber. We had not advanced more than half a mile before nearly a hundred horsemen emerged from the woods.

Flat Mouth was worried, for well he knew that it would take more than an ordinary hunting party to stand off such a force. At the start the chances favored us, as our animals were well rested, whereas the enemy's had been ridden far and fast. There was no question as to our maintaining a safe lead, providing none of our animals met with an accident. Realizing this my eyes became focused on the flying feet of Miss Dearness' mount. At every stride I expected to see a hoof stick into a hole and hurl her to the ground, leaving one of our mounts to carry double. I glanced back once more and beheld even more warriors quitting the woods.

Flat Mouth grimly explained:

"Big war-party going to fight the Mandans. We shall have them all the way."

He insisted it was the medicine of the girl's hair that permitted us to drop them before night came. I felt a great uplift when, with the last light, I failed to make out their figures against the northern sky-line. The chief quietly assured me they would be on our trail in the morning.

We camped that night in the bed of a dry coulée. The chief managed to kill a buffalo calf with his bow and arrow, and we ventured to build a small fire, fencing it about with our white robes. Over this we broiled some excellent steaks and cooked enough to carry with us on the morrow. At daybreak we were up, and beheld figures creeping over the horizon.

The country grew rougher with each hour, and we lost the Assiniboins only when we dropped into the hollows. On surmounting ridge or hillock we raised them to view again, tenaciously sticking to our track. Flat Mouth had eyes only for what was ahead, seeking for some opportunity of shaking the enemy off. I was always staring behind me, fascinated by the implacable purpose that held the savages to the chase. The girl rode with head bowed, seldom bothering to lift her gaze from the ground. Her fear was an accident to her pony.

We began to encounter coulées filled with water, each a sign-post for the Couteau du Missouri, the rough and hilly country we must cross before descending to the Missouri River. The Pillager believed the Assiniboins would not venture beyond this height of land. Yet they were in such strong force they might recklessly risk an encounter with Mandan or Minnetaree.

AHEAD were the steep red banks of the Missouri. At our feet were two cows freshly slain. Flat Mouth inspected them, and for the first time since our flight from the Cheyenne his immobile features showed animation.

"The brains have been taken to dress hides. Hunters did it, not a war-party after meat. Only Mandans hunt here."

The Assiniboins had been lost to sight for a day. In their place we were dreading a Sioux war-party, for the Sioux hung closely about the Mandan villages, seeking to pick off a victim or two. To the north of the villages was a stretch of timber, and in this cover small bands of the Sioux would hide and wait for days, being satisfied if they killed a lone hunter or a woman. We had passed through the rough country of the Couteau and had an excellent view of the river in the southeast. Flat Mouth insisted we were too far down-stream and said we must cross a high and precipitous bank on our right. To me it seemed a needless exertion, as we could round the end of the ridge by skirting its base until it broke off at the river, but the chief felt the menace of the Sioux and must have his way. I did not believe the horses could make the ridge, for the soil was glutinous mud from the spring rains.

The Pillager dismounted to demonstrate what an Indian pony could do and with the beast scrambling like a cat he led the way up the slope. Miss Dearness made light of it, although she was forced to climb it afoot. On reaching the top we had a more intimate view of the river. The valley was some two miles in width and caged in by steep banks. The current was sluggish and swollen, dotted with much driftwood and many black dots which I knew to be drowned buffalo. Immediately below us was a growth of big cottonwoods, and from our position to these woods ran a well-beaten path.

For the first time since our race began, I presumed to take the lead, but before I could do more than press ahead to the brow of the ridge, Flat Mouth was halting me and explaining that the way was full of dangers and that he must go first. I placed my gun across my saddle, but the danger was not animate and consisted of certain deep holes, or pits the Indians had dug for trapping fox and wolves. These pits were ten or more feet deep, with the openings masked by the dead grass.

We descended slowly and cautiously, skirting several of these menaces, and I know I should have plunged into the first one, had I had my way. At the foot of the ridge the Pillager reined in and warned:

"We must say we have come from Fort Assiniboin, that the Medicine Hair is the daughter of the big white chief there and that we work for him. The big white chief wishes to open a post here and sends his daughter because her medicine lets her see things we men can not see. He has told us to stay but a few days and to ask for warriors to go back with us as far as the Mouse. The Mandans must not know we were driven here by the Assiniboins. They would think the white woman's medicine was weak and that her father was a little chief if they knew the Assiniboins had made us run."

"Why can't we start back as soon as we get fresh horses?" I anxiously asked, my mind reverting to the incompetent Probos in charge of the post and to old Tabashaw bullying him for rum.

"And why must we travel by the way of the Mouse?" demanded Miss Dearness, referring to the long route to the confluence of the Mouse and the Qu'Appelle, thence down the Assiniboin to the Forks, where we would turn south up the Red.

"We must stay and look about, as if looking for a good place for a post," Flat Mouth patiently explained. Then to the girl—"We must come from Fort Assiniboin to show why we are here. We must go back the same way to make our talk sound straight. Even if we could pick our trail we must return by way of the Mouse and the Assiniboin. It is the regular path and safer."

I told Miss Dearness the chief was right and that a few days wouldn't make much difference, that we ought to be thankful at having escaped the Sioux and the Assiniboins—this to cheer her up.

"Oh, we will go through with it," she wearily replied. "I was thinking of you and your affairs more than of mine. I have no trade to lose. Angus can watch the post till I get back or my successor arrives."

With our story understood we started

ahead, taking the semblance of a road which had been much traveled but never repaired. It was filled with mud and holes and eloquently revealed the ravages of the Spring freshet. We followed this into the woods and continued through the growth for two miles. It was most abominable traveling. At last we were clear of it and were come to a riot of beans, squash and corn sprouts, but so mixed with grass that I proclaimed it to be mighty poor gardening. I was disappointed, as I had heard much about the Mandans as agriculturists. Flat Mouth explained, however, that these budding growths were runaways and represented only what the wind had stolen and sown broadcast. The tribe's gardens were farther on.

"Here is the village!" warned the girl.

She checked her mount and stared wonderingly and, with a little shudder, exclaimed:

"It's like a village of the dead. Where are the Indians?"

Flat Mouth twisted uneasily in his saddle and whispered:

"It is a village of the dead—a village they left when I was here last. The gardens would not grow. After so many years the ground refuses to care for the seed; then they move. When they left this place they used it for their dead."

We pressed ahead a bit and came in full view of the gruesome exhibit. The girl quailed for a moment, then held up her head and gazed about steadily. Everywhere were platforms some ten feet in height, and on these were laid the dead. The shrouds were of dressed leather, some in very excellent condition and fit for trade; but for the most part the coverings had succumbed to the weather and had fallen apart, allowing the bones to show. Some of the platforms had fallen to the ground and no attempt had been made to replace them or their grim burdens. We quickened our pace and soon were beyond the forbidding spot.

"Remember our talk!" warned the Pillager, kicking his horse into a gallop and riding ahead.

OFF at one side and at a distance was an Indian with a gun. Around him were women and children working. These were the gardeners and they were planting and hoeing under an armed guard. This was impressive proof of their daily danger. Even at the very outskirts of their villages they did not dare to move about without a sentinel. Just as the Red River of the North always contained the menace of the Sioux, so did the stretch of woods hold for Mandan and Minnetaree a hidden danger.

At the Pillager's gesture the girl and I halted while he rode to the man with the gun. I saw the fellow nervously cock his piece, then stand keenly at attention while Flat Mouth, with both hands above his head, talked to him. Suddenly the gun was lowered, and the guard was shaking hands warmly with our companion.

"He recognizes him," murmured the girl.

The two conversed for several minutes, then came to us. Flat Mouth announced it was all right, that we were to proceed and find quarters at the village a short distance ahead. The guard smiled broadly and shook hands with me, but seemed to stand in awe of Miss Dearness. Later I learned the Pillager had filled him with tales concerning the wonderful medicine she possessed and her powers as a magician. Then the guard looked at my pony and at the chief's and said something we could not understand.

"He asks where our presents are," translated the Pillager.

He might well be puzzled, for beyond the white robes snugly wrapped in my blanket we had no possessions. No voluntary visitor to the villages would fail to bring a pack-animal or two loaded with gifts.

Before I could scare up an answer the girl was haughtily saying in Chippewa:

"Tell him the big white chief does not send gifts by his friends. He has slaves to bring them. They will come later. He will decide how much to send after he hears how we have been treated."

Flat Mouth's eyes twinkled as he listened, but his bearing was stern and haughty as he translated her words to the guard.

The guard next informed us that an H. B. man was living in the village across the river, but was now on the headwaters of the Missouri looking for trade in Spring beaver.

The man returned to his charge, and we rode on. All I could think of on first glimpsing the round domes of the Mandan houses was of a colony of gigantic beavers. These huts were very large, some being ninety feet in diameter and so solidly built that fifty men could lounge on their tops at a time. The door of each was of rawhide, stretched over willow, and was nearly six feet square. A broad porch led up to this. Near each porch was a platform, a score of feet long, half as wide and eight or nine feet high. On these platforms they stored their corn to dry in the Fall, also their meat, but now these were being used for driftwood.

Flat Mouth told us the village depended entirely for their supply of fuel on what the river brought down each Spring. From my view of the swollen stream and its innumerable trees I could see the toll must be enormous. The reason why we had not seen more Indians in traveling to the village was because the able-bodied were busy swimming in the icy current and bringing the drift ashore, while their people watched and encouraged them. Besides the driftwood they brought drowned buffalo ashore in large numbers, and these were already giving off the stench of decay. My Chippewas would salvage the dead brutes when the ice went out, when the meat was firm and fresh, but the Mandans and the Minnetarees, the Pillager assured me, preferred the tainted to the fresh.

What men I saw on shore were stout and strongly built and wore their hair trailing at their heels and even sweeping the ground. As they daubed this daily with red and white earth the effect was grotesque. The same cough which was troubling our Indians seemed to be common with them.

As we entered the village we were discovered and quickly surrounded. They greeted us cordially, shaking hands and seemingly much pleased at our coming. Some recognized Flat Mouth and hailed him as a friend. Then they commenced asking where we had left our packs. As he had explained to the armed guard, so now did the Pillager explain to the tribe that while we represented the greatest traders of the North we had brought no goods with us either for trade or for gifts. Their faces fell.

The chief continued to explain how our errand was to investigate the chances of trade. Of course he described Miss Dearness as being a medicine-woman and the daughter of the big white chief at the head of the fort on the Assiniboin. It was grimly amusing that I should pose as an *engagé* instead of *bourgeois*, that she, of the opposition, should masquerade as my superior.

The interest Miss Dearness aroused was accumulative, and it was plain she created a tremendous impression. One young buck standing close to her pony reached up a hand to feel the texture of her fiery hair. As quick as loup-cervier her hand rose, and the handle of her leather whip landed on his wrist, causing him to spring back in dismay. I think it was the blazing fire of her blue eyes, rather than any physical hurt from the blow, that startled the fellow.

Flat Mouth took occasion to warn that the hair was medicine and that the white woman had saved the young man's life by preventing his touching it. After that incident the circle widened. In turn the Indians informed us that the Sioux had been very troublesome ever since the snow melted, and that since Le Borgne (The Blind), the great war chief of the Minnetarees on the Knife a few miles above, had gone out with a hunting party, the Mandans had kept their huts barricaded every night. On his return an alliance was to be formed with the Cheyennes and aggressive measures taken to teach the enemy a lasting lesson.

Flat Mouth to further increase our prestige and make them forget we came without gifts, now stated that the good-will of the white woman was worth a war-party and that her anger was equal to a blast of lightning.

Firmly believing as he did that the girl possessed powers of magic, he did not hesitate to draw a long bow, and I was fearing that she might be requested to bolster up her reputation by some little display, when a newcomer distracted the attention. This was none less than Poscopsahe, or Black Cat, the chief of the village. We were presented to him and he was duly impressed by the girl and assured her that the big white chief would do well to send traders there and to the Minnetaree villages above, but especially to his village of the Mandans. This jealousy, when it came to acquiring the white man's goods in trade, was very keen among the villages, although they would unite readily and solidly enough in opposing their ancient enemies.

Through the Pillager, the girl calmly replied that she had heard the Mandans had a good trade in robes and buffalo tongues and a fair trade in beaver; that she would look the villages over for a day or so and then report back to Fort Assiniboin.

With these ceremonies out of the way we were shown to a hut reserved for visitors. I took my pack of white robes inside and turned the horses over to a young man. One of the chief's wives followed us to the hut with a huge dish of boiled corn and beans, a tasteless mess, and another of dried meat. The latter was impossible because of the Mandans' preference for tainted to fresh meat, so on the whole we made a sorry meal of it.

Despite our explanation that we had no goods to trade, nor gifts to bestow, the men, women and children crowded about our hut, eager for us to open our packs. The fact that they had seen all our possessions, namely my bundle of robes, did not spoil their imagination. White people always had gifts, always wanted to trade. They believed that in some mysterious manner we would produce articles of the white man's making which they were so eager to secure. It was with the greatest difficulty that Flat Mouth persuaded them to believe we had nothing to trade, and their attitude was sullen when they finally withdrew.

After they left us in peace the Pillager advised that we take up different quarters, urging that by doing so we would create a better impression. So we decided that Miss Dearness should remain in the guest hut with the chief's wife as attendant, while the Pillager and I found shelter elsewhere. Leaving her with the Indian woman, we went out to look the village over. The Mandans, being a settled people, had no need for dogs, so this nuisance was not in evidence. The children, too, were quite decently mannered, although they would have stolen the clothes off my back had I given them a chance. The population of this and the village across the river was about two thousand, Flat Mouth said. I suggested we cross over and visit the second village. Flat Mouth called out to some young men, and, on my giving them a few inches of tobacco, they readily agreed to set us across.

Proceeding to the river, I had my first sight of a bull-boat, as their curious skin canoes are called. They were much different from the skin canoes we used on the Red River, being circular in shape and formed of raw buffalo hides stretched over a frame of willow. The craft had the appearance of being very frail and not a bit suitable for navigating the swollen and muddy waters of the Missouri, yet each was capable of carrying eight hundred pounds or more.

One man did the paddling, and his paddle was a five-foot pole with a strip of board lashed across the end. With his first stroke the boat turned nearly around, but he quickly reversed us with a stroke on the other side. First one was looking up-stream at the mass of floating trees and dead buffalo, then down-stream. It made me dizzy, yet our man was an expert, for we drifted less than a quarter of a mile, whereas the average boatman would have drifted a full mile.

THE news of our arrival in the first Mandan village had spread across the river, and on landing we were met by a crowd of natives, headed by Big Man, a Cheyenne prisoner and now adopted into the tribe—a man of prominence. He shook us warmly by the hand and anxiously asked why we had left all our packs in Black Cat's village. The tedious explanation was given by Flat Mouth and the interest of the assemblage flattened out, and many turned away to resume the work of towing trees and dead buffalo ashore.

Through the Pillager I learned from Big Man that the Minnetaree village was much excited over the arrival of six Cheyennes seeking a peace treaty. Messengers had been sent for Le Borgne to bring him back from the hunt. Black days were waiting for the Sioux, once the treaty was perfected. We paraded the village, finding it a duplicate of the one across the river. We were invited into several huts to eat, but always found the meat abominable. On the outskirts of the village women with hoes made from buffalo shoulder-blades were working in their gardens, with armed men stationed at intervals. Their danger was intimate, much like that which surrounds some of the smaller wood-folk who live under stumps, sporting and raising their little families while death stalks them day and night.

The Pillager mumbled to me—

"We must go back now."

I had known him long enough to realize that he was disturbed at something. Thanking Big Man and telling him he should have presents when our traders arrived, we returned to the river and were ferried across.

"Something makes my brother sad," I remarked in Chippewa after we had stepped ashore.

"I was glad when I heard that the Blind was away on a buffalo hunt. My heart is heavy now, for they send to bring him home to meet the Cheyennes."

"You believed we should find him here before we arrived," I reminded.

"I knew and hoped for the best. When we came and found him gone my heart sang. I believed we should get away before he returned. Now to find he will come back, makes me sorry."

"The Blind does not like white men?"

"He likes white men," was the laconic response.

"Then why feel sad to know he is coming back?"

"He likes women. He has never seen such a woman as Medicine Hair. He is a mighty war chief. His word is law in both Minnetaree and Mandan villages. When we fought the Sioux and the Assiniboins I thought only of escaping to a place where we would not be killed. I knew we would not be harmed in these villages. Now I have had time to think. What the Blind wants he takes."

The danger must be pressing when an Indian would be troubled over the fate of a white woman. His words reduced my complacency to ashes. I could only say—

"We must start before he comes back."

"They will think our coming is a trick if we go away too quickly," he warned. "I will talk with the Mandans and ask if they have seen any signs of Assiniboins or Sioux to the north. We must visit the villages, but in one or two sleeps we might start for the Mouse. Once we reach Fort Assiniboin the Medicine Hair will be safe."

"But Le Borgne would be very blind to make the whites angry by taking one of their women," I protested.

Flat Mouth smiled in grim pity at my ignorance.

"You do not know the Blind," he murmured. "He takes what he wants. No chief is as powerful as he. When I was here before, he took a woman from a Mandan chief who went with his war-club to bring her back. They buried his war-club with him. He likes white men. He will treat you better than his warriors, but he doesn't let anything stand between him and the thing he wants."

FROM the end of the village rose the girl's wonderful voice, singing her quaint song, in which one heard the rush of the river and the sighing of the wind, a voice of sadness and pathos, yet colored with a rare beauty. For the first time I realized there were no Indians hanging about us begging for tobacco and gifts. We walked to the guest-hut and found the entire village grouped about it. Black Cat was seated on a robe, before the entrance, smoking his Missouri tobacco—villainous stuff—and wondering at the medicine of her voice.

"When she sings her medicine song I see the leaves turn yellow and drop, and I feel the first of the snow. I hear the ice breaking up and smell the first grass," said Black Cat as we stood beside him.

"She calls the voices from rivers and sends them back when she is tired of them," Flat Mouth boasted. "She is very strong medicine. It is her hair. The Chippewas are afraid of her."

"The Chippewas are old women," snorted Black Cat.

Flat Mouth's visage grew very wicked. From inside the robe he was wearing Mandan-fashion he pulled forth a grisly string of Sioux scalps, shook them in Black Cat's face and hoarsely taunted:

"I am a Chippewa. I do not hide in a village when the Sioux of the Plains come near. I go out and kill them. Have the Mandans any old women who take scalps like these?"

It was a master-stroke for putting the beggars in their proper place. The Cat was unable to speak for a full minute. His eyes glowed and gloated over the trophies. He sprang to his feet and loudly proclaimed:

"My Chippewa brother is a very brave man. I will adopt him as a son. He shall have a new war name. He shall have many wives. He shall carry the pipe for us against our enemies."

I feared Flat Mouth would indulge in more boasting and scornfully flout the chief's offer, but his finesse was sharpened because of the girl's peril. He replied—

"After I have taken Medicine Hair back to her father."

This gave the Cat great pleasure. He pictured himself basking in the glory of his new son, the recipient of homage, the possessor of many scalps. He loudly announced he would give a feast for the mighty Chippewa and forthwith directed his wives to prepare an abundance of stinking meat, corn and beans. The Indians scattered in all directions to make ready for the festival. Black Cat hurried off to see his commands were obeyed, and, with a glance at me, the Pillager walked beside him.

I remained before the hut. The door swung open a crack, then wide open, and Miss Dearness confronted me, her eyes searching mine anxiously.

"When can we start from this place?" she whispered.

"Very soon—in a few days."

"A few days!" she faintly exclaimed. "Something tells me we must start at once."

"The Pillager would say it is your medicine," I bantered.

"It is instinct. It has never failed me since I came to the Indian country. Let us start tonight!"

"But that would invite danger. We must make a pretense of looking the villages over for trade purposes," I protested. "If there is any vital, any immediate danger, of course we will start at once and fight for it. Now tell me just what has happened."

"Nothing has happened," she slowly replied, her eyes staring into mine and yet not beholding me. "But I'm afraid—I am horribly afraid—different from anything I ever felt in my life—I'm never afraid of death." With this she closed the door, leaving me standing there gaping like a zany.

CHAPTER IX

AT THE MINNETAREE VILLAGE

EARLY next morning Flat Mouth and I went to Miss Dearness' hut and, on her joining us at the porch, asked her to make ready for a trip to the Minnetaree villages a few miles above, situated on the Knife River. To attempt leaving the country without visiting these "Big Bellies," as the trade had named them, would be to incur the wrath of Le Borgne and throw discredit on our story of representing the N. W. Company and its plan to set up an opposition to the already established H. B. trader.

The girl was afraid. Her bearing was calm and collected enough, but there were transient flashes in her big blue eyes, a curious trick of glancing sidewise through half closed lids, that bespoke a furtive fear. However, she readily agreed we must visit the upper villages to sustain our rôle. She only insisted that we make all haste to have it over with.

As I was anxious to go and return before Le Borgne came back, I directed Flat Mouth to engage men to cross our horses, promising them some handsome pipes when the traders arrived with their assortment of goods. The Mandans proved to be as expert in handling the horses in the river as they had been in collecting the driftwood. Hitching a line to a nag's mouth, a brave would take the end between his teeth and swim ahead while others swam alongside and behind the animal. In this way the three were taken across quickly and drifted down-stream scarcely at all.

When we landed from the bull-boat and mounted our horses, we were surrounded by the entire village, every one being anxious to gaze on the white woman with the medicine hair. Miss Dearness would have drawn her capote over her head but the Pillager urged her not to, declaring that the belief she was a magician would help us much. So she rode between us with her oriflamme of a head glinting in the early sunlight and making me think of a maple turned red by the first frosts.

Flat Mouth improvised a legend which he sung as we slowly made our way through the crowd. It was to the effect that beams of sunlight became imprisoned in the girl's hair when she was born, and that their struggles to escape created the powerful medicine she possessed.

Big Man walked by my side and informed me a hunting party of a hundred braves was due to arrive home after a three days' trip and that, if we would postpone our visit to the Minnetarees, we could procure some fresh meat. I immediately feared lest the Minnetaree chief, Le Borgne, would be with this party, but Flat Mouth explained that the Minnetarees hunted to the southwest of the Knife and the

Mandans to the southeast, the river being the boundary. We needed fresh meat badly, but the hunting party would greatly delay our journey up the river, so we pressed on more determinedly than ever.

I assured Miss Dearness that we could make the villages, ride through them and start back for Black Cat's village before dark. On returning and recrossing the river we could decide whether to start north immediately, unaccompanied, or wait till morning and endeavor to obtain an escort from the Mandans. The girl was for an immediate departure.

I had planned to take my white robes with me, thinking I might have a chance to trade them for horses, they being about the only thing the Minnetarees would exchange horses for. Flat Mouth, however, insisted such a trade would consume all the day, that the horses we had were fresh enough, and that the hides had better be left behind in the hut, where they would be perfectly safe.

So we rode forth. Miss Dearness' peculiar type of loveliness was greatly accented by the appearance of the Mandan women, who could not be called comely even by Indian standards. I never could understand why the Crows, the most lascivious of all the Indians I ever met, should be the most prepossessing in appearance, or why the women of the Aricaras, the most treacherous of any tribe I ever encountered, should approach the nearest to the white standard of good looks.

Miss Dearness was not inclined to talk, and we rode rapidly, as if eager to have done with a disagreeable errand. The road we followed was very decent and led us over two hills and then for two miles across a plain, skirting a small village which we did not enter. The whole distance was through an area of gardens which included much ground given over to the cultivation of sunflowers. In every direction were horses grazing on the early grass, and Flat Mouth's eyes glittered as became a true Pillager. All these animals were brought into the villages at night, revealing the Indians' constant dread of their inveterate enemies, the Sioux and the Assiniboins. The Mandans kept their ponies in their huts while the Minnetarees used small corrals.

These villages on the Missouri and Knife were distinct from any I ever became acquainted with. They suggested permanency and a strong devotion to the soil, especially the villages of the Mandans. Our road along the south bank of the Missouri to the Knife afforded almost continuous glimpses of a bucolic life which made me think of Canadian villages.

All hunting was done in large bands, Flat Mouth told me, for fear of surprize attacks. Each hunting party, therefore, contained the potentials of a war-party. Even when in large numbers the warriors did not care to wander far from their homes lest the villages be assaulted in force during their absence. Because of this caution it became necessary to conserve the buffalo and under no circumstances scare him away. It resulted that they aimed to surround a small herd of a few hundred and kill every one. They believed that if a survivor escaped he would communicate his alarm to other herds. Nor did they use their guns in hunting, but always the bow and arrow.

The first pause in our journey was at the Minnetaree village at the mouth of the Knife, consisting of half a hundred huts and called the "little village." We very quickly learned there was a great difference between this and either of the Mandan villages in regard to manners.

The moment we were sighted a mob of young demons surrounded us, hooting and deriding. Their elders sat smoking their miserable tobacco on top of the huge circular huts and enjoying the spectacle. More troublesome even than the children were the dogs which swarmed from all directions. They were as vicious as wolves and much more daring.

Miss Dearness, who had drawn her capote over her head when we neared the village, gave a cry of alarm, and I spurred forward and brained a brute with the butt of my gun as he leaped high to pull her from the saddle. This act caused much scowling and mumbling from the spectators, which I interpreted to be threats. Flat Mouth leaned low from his saddle and did for another beast with his ax. The mumbling broke into a sullen roar, and the men on the huts began rising and preparing to descend.

Flat Mouth pulled out his string of Sioux scalps and, waving them above his head, shouted his name and the fact that he had once lived among the Mandans and the Minnetarees. Then in their own tongue he chanted his record of coups, touching a scalp as he narrated the details of each encounter. The men on the huts gathered to the edge and allowed their feet to hang down while they listened.

Finishing the story of his exploits, the Pillager explained how he was serving the woman with the medicine hair, the most wonderful woman ever on the Missouri, whose father was the mightiest of all traders and who had intended to build a post among the villages so the Indians could always obtain whatever they wanted in arms and ammunition. He significantly concluded with saying:

"The big white chief will send no traders where his daughter is met by mad dogs and screaming children."

Then, turning to Miss Dearness, he directed her to reveal her hair.

She obeyed, and as the Indians stared at her fiery hair, those on the ground drew back and forgot their scowls, while those on the huts stood erect and forgot their smoking. As the Pillager rapidly translated his speech to me I understood their concern; each village was anxious to obtain all the white man's goods possible and was extremely jealous of every visit made by a trader to a neighboring village.

Their lack of hospitality was an excellent excuse for us to save time by pushing on. Although they beseeched us to enter their huts and partake of food and tobacco, we held on steadily through the village and into the road leading up the Knife. They followed us outside the village but we gave them no heed. We followed the road for about a mile when the Pillager halted and announced that we were opposite the big Minnetaree village. He said it consisted of some hundred and thirty huts, but, rub my eyes as I would, I could not see it.

Then he explained this. The last of the five villages was located a mile back from the river, and because of this fact and the resulting problem over fuel the warriors moved into the hills each Winter, where they had more circular huts and wood aplenty. We forded the Knife with the water up to our horses' bellies and made a dash for the village.

THIS time we met less of the rudeness which had greeted us below, and yet there was no suggestion of hospitality. They were rude in another way. We were ignored. They were most arrogant in their bearing. After ordering a woman to show us to a big hut, set apart for visitors, they paid no attention to us. A physical characteristic of all Minnetarees was the large aquiline nose. The Pillager assured us we were safe among them, but added that this was the case purely because they must have arms from traders to protect themselves from the Sioux, and they believed that we were paving the way for permanent traders. The village originally contained a thousand huts, but the deadly small-pox had whittled it down to its present proportions.

The hut we were shown to was a duplicate of the one in Black Cat's village except that it was dug down three feet below the surface. As in the Mandan huts we found earthen pots and a copper kettle. The kettle, it seems, was used entirely for boiling meat. Why they couldn't cook meat in the earthenware, as they did their corn and beans, I do not know. Some foolish superstition was behind it, of course. I asked the woman about it, and she said the meat would make the earthen pots crack.

I quickly learned it was unsafe to move outside the hut unless armed with a club. The first time I stepped to the door to survey the scene, I was set upon by a huge dog. I kicked myself clear of the brute and after that I never ventured abroad without a club in my hand. So long as we remained in the hut we were left by ourselves. The moment we passed through the door we were surrounded by impish brats who would go through our clothes and filch anything they could. Miss Dearness went out with us once, but the repulsive sights and the constant attendance of the vicious-mannered mob which accompanied us every step was experience enough for her.

"You and the Pillager carry out your plans," she urged after we returned to the hut. "But let us start back to the Mandan village before dark."

"It's a beastly place," I admitted, pitying her deeply. "I almost wish, for your sake, we had tried to win back north without coming here. I think we could have made it."

"No, we stood no chance. The Sioux were too close, the Assiniboins too many. Our lives are safe here, but we ought to be starting for the Red River within a day or two." After a pause she asked, "When do you think Le Borgne will come?"

"Not till after we have gone. You have heard of him?"

"My father spoke of him when we were on the Assiniboin. The Indians had much to tell of him. But go and finish your business so we can be getting away."

The undercurrent of her thoughts was Le Borgne, that sinister master of the Minnetarees, who ruled as an autocrat, an unusual condition of affairs among the Indians. I did not care to ask her what she had heard about the chief; it was sure to be something disquieting. I picked up my club and, followed by Flat Mouth, passed from the hut.

We had a brisk battle with the dogs but finally put them to rout. Young bucks swaggered close, glaring murderously at our success over their pets. One was so bold as to step before the Pillager to block his path, or to make him step aside. Flat Mouth slapped him in the face with his string of Sioux scalps, called him a "child," and asked how long before he could grow up and kill a Sioux.

The buck, maddened beyond self-control and knowing the warriors were watching his shame, grabbed for his ax. Flat Mouth smiled evilly and dangled the string before his face. The hand on the ax relaxed. I was using the medicine bag taken from the war-chief killed in the Red Lake River country, as a tobacco pouch. Now I produced it, filled my pipe and through the Pillager advised the young man and his friend not to bother mighty warriors who never bothered to slay any but chiefs carrying the pipe.

The display of scalps and the sight of the medicine pouch brought the elders to sharp attention. Several approached, their bearing very decorous, and questioned the Pillager. He proudly proclaimed himself a hero and gave his new name of Sioux Killer. He declared I came next to him and said the white woman with the medicine hair was more powerful than both of us.

The lowering glances continued, yet your exhibit of trophies had made a deep impression and forced their respect. Their great chief, Le Borgne, would have been proud to recite the coups the Pillager had recounted. Harsh commands were given, and the band of children drew back, the young men ceased their insolence, and women clubbed the dogs to the outskirts of the village.

Then Le Borgne's brother, Caltahcota, or Choke-cherry, as the traders knew him, deigned to make himself known and inquired minutely into the purpose of our visit. He was pleased with the story I told through the Pillager, and said his brother would be very glad to welcome us, but that we had done wrong in not bringing guns, powder and ball with us, as the Sioux were very thick and troublesome around the village.

The Pillager sneered and loudly declared he would drive the Sioux away and double the length of his string. Choke-cherry seemed to accept him at his own estimation, and his respect took on a touch of awe. He insisted we go into his hut and eat.

We followed him and were presented with bowls of meat that only one word can describe—putrid. Even for politeness' sake I could not endure the stench of it, let alone tasting it. Choke-cherry gobbled at it voraciously and gave us some dried beans and corn, bruised in a mortar, cooked without salt, and very tasteless. Still it could be swallowed. Flat Mouth was not particular as to what he ate, yet there were limits to even his Indian appetite and stomach. He partook only of the corn and beans. While we were bolting our portions he assured me that the Minnetarees would kill a buffalo in Winter, leave it in the snow and wait until decomposition had set in before using it for food. I could well believe it.

ESCAPING to the free air, I asked Choke-cherry when his mighty brother would be back. He believed in a few days. He was very vague, indicating he knew no more about it than we did. The six Cheyenne envoys had withdrawn a mile north of the village to await the coming of more of their people. Upon their arrival the treaty between them and the Minnetarees would be duly cemented. The Minnetarees would adopt a Cheyenne youth and many presents would be "placed under the stem." While Le Borgne was too big a man to abandon a hunting trip for any purpose except to follow his own will, it was probable he would return very soon.

With the Pillager interpreting I said:

"We must go back to the lower villages tonight. When your brother comes send a man to us so we may come to him."

He urged that we remain with the Minnetarees indefinitely, but I explained we had certain trade preparations to make, and he finally agreed to inform us when the chief arrived.

Utterly disgusted with the villages, determined to get away where I could feel clean once more, and sensing that it must be hell for Miss Dearness, I made up my mind on the spot to make a break north from the Mandan village early the next morning. Fear of the Sioux would keep the village Indians from pursuing us, while the presence of the Cheyennes on the Knife, anxious to make peace, would tend to make both Sioux and Assiniboins chary about remaining in that neighborhood.

The Mandans, while peacefully disposed and much less arrogant than the Minnetarees, were known as dogged fighters. Allied with the Cheyennes, they could carry a good fight to the Sioux, and the latter knew it. By striking directly north and traveling much by night I believed we could make the big loop of the Mouse. After following the Mouse a short distance we would be within the sphere of influence of the N. W. Company, represented by Fort Assiniboin, and our dangers from hostile red men would be over. Nor did I expect any difficulty in leaving the Mandan village. We had come and gone as we pleased, our story was believed, and we had visited the Minnetaree village to consult with Le Borgne's brother.

Leaving Choke-cherry — Cherry-on-a-Bush was his full name, I believe—we returned to the hut and found Miss Dearness seated on a robe before the empty firehole and looking very sad. I briefly explained my purpose, and it was worth great risks to behold the wonderful lighting up of the blue eyes as she turned them on me.

"It will succeed!" she cried in English. "It must! Oh, you've removed a big load from my heart. To be out in the open—to breathe clean air again—anything but this!"

"You've seen so much of Indian life in traveling with your father that you must be prepared to withstand what would shock an inexperienced white woman," I remarked.

"True," she murmured. "I can force myself to indifference to much that's repulsive—a make-believe indifference, anyway. I've said the Indians talked of Le Borgne on the Assiniboin. I've also heard the H. B. men describe him in talking with my father. He likes to meet white men. He treats them better than his warriors do. He's shrewd enough to know he must have arms, and he can get them only through the white traders. From the Indian standpoint he is a very great man. Yes, he's that even by our standards. He controls these villages absolutely, and you know how dearly an Indian prizes his personal liberty. Le Borgne overrides many hard-and-fast rules of ordinary Indian usage. What he wants he takes."

Her face went red as she finished; then the color receded, leaving her cheeks a ghastly white, and her hand fumbled at something inside her leather coat, probably her knife.

"You understand him as well as the Pillager does," I gravely commented. "Perhaps it's best you should."

"The truth is always best," she simply replied. "The fact is there. It would be foolish to hide from it as a calf hides his head in the grass to escape a hunter."

Flat Mouth, who had listened and picked up a word here and there, now broke in:

"When I was here last, Le Borgne would go into a hut and take a warrior's wife away from him. The warrior never made any fight. Le Borgne is a great chief."

His lack of finesse in making the brutal speech would have angered me more if I did not believe the girl knew all that he knew. She glanced with a curious little smile and quietly said—

"Well, he will never take me."

"What nonsense! Of course not!" I cried hotly. "To hear us one would think this raw savage was all powerful. Then again, let's give him credit for having some sense. He wants traders to come here so he can stand off the Sioux. Is he fool enough to spoil all the chances for saving his people from the Sioux by turning every trader against him? Of course not. Miss Dearness, you haven't any cause to worry."

She reached out and patted my hand and murmured—

"Comforter!" Then she reminded—"Yet there is some danger, so great that you plan to return to the Mouse without an escort."

She had me. In all honesty I insisted

our proposed flight was impelled by idle fears, so far as we knew. Beyond the general character of Le Borgne we had no reason for deducing he would bring down the wrath of the American Government upon him by stealing a white woman.

"Tell that to these Indians and they will laugh at you," she jeered. "You can't make them believe but what they are the most superior and the most brave people on earth. There may come a time when your Government can control them. Now they have no more respect for or fear of your Government than that of China, which they never heard of. Why, they even believe they outnumber the whites. Tell them of big white villages beyond the Mississippi, and they will tell you that you lie. I've traveled enough with my father and have heard enough trade-talk to at least know that much."

I had to admit the truth of her statements and shifted to the contention that the chief's imperative need of guns would come first in his heart. He might laugh at the United States Government as a shadowy thing, but he would never laugh at the Sioux and a powerful trading company. Believing we all three represented the N. W. company, he would be anxious for us to carry back pleasant reports and thereby hasten the establishment of a permanent post.

"And yet you plan to escape at the earliest opportunity—tomorrow morning if we can manage it," she monotonously reminded.

"We can wait and see the chief and have him send an escort with us," I boldly declared.

With a little shudder she protested:

"No! No! We must start tomorrow. Instinct tells me we must do so. I only wish we could start now. I tell you I am afraid, and I'm not bothered with any silly imagination. I feel as if something were about to happen."

"For heaven's sake don't let our friend here know that, or he'll sit down and sing his death song, waiting for some one to club him to death. You're big medicine to him. So long as he can believe that, he can do much."

"Medicine Hair big medicine," murmured Flat Mouth, catching at the familiar words, although puzzled by the rest of our talk.

She raised her head and stared at us both haughtily. The effect at once registered on the Pillager. Smoothing out her wonderful hair, she softly sounded the ululating call that carried the whispering of the wind and the prattling of shallow rivers. The chief stood very straight, his head tipped back, his nostrils distended.

There was a warrior's ambition in his small eyes. If he had been disturbed by her downcast mien he was now restored to all his old-time strutting complacency. He was the chief of the Pillager Chippewas. The Minnetarees were low dogs who lived cooped up in a village and ate stinking meat. The hand that struck against his robe where hung his scalps was itching for more bloody work. Then the door of the hut swung open, and Choke-cherry stood before us, blinking at the girl.

HE WAS wearing a gorgeous head-gear made from a turkey-cock's tail, and he seemed much puffed up with his own importance. For a few moments he forgot his errand and stared at Miss Dearness and her lustrous hair. With an effort he recalled his business and, in a loud voice, began reciting. As he talked he pounded his chest and glanced from me to the girl and then to the impassive Pillager. When he had finished, the Pillager explained that the messenger sent to inform Le Borgne of the Cheyennes' presence at the village had found the great chief a short distance up the Knife. But, being a great chief, it did not please his fancy to quit the hunt, even for making the peace treaty. Accordingly he had sent the messenger back with directions for his brother, the renowned and redoubtable Choke-cherry, to treat with the Cheyennes and to adopt the Cheyenne youth.

These delegated powers had swollen Choke-cherry's conceit almost to the exploding point. Out of five brothers to Le Borgne he had been picked. He had sent word to the Cheyenne camp that he was coming to act for his illustrious brother and, to give more tone to the ceremony, he desired his new friends to be present.

Miss Dearness' face remained cold and proud, but her soul was on her lips when she whispered to me:

"Thank God he isn't coming. You two go, and I will wait here."

On being informed of our decision, Choke-cherry violently objected. He needed the medicine of her hair, he said. Never had the Cheyennes seen such hair. Her attendance was absolutely necessary, he insisted.

"You'd better come," I urged after Flat Mouth had interpreted. "It will give us better standing with them. We can ride directly from the ceremony to the lower village."

"If you think best," she surrendered, rising and gathering up her capote.

Choke-cherry had had small chance to wear the purple, I took it, and his dignity and conceit were terrific. As Choke-cherry, the warriors would have laughed at him; as the mouth-piece of his illustrious brother, his orders were obeyed with great celerity. Our horses were brought to the hut, and the buck who acted as hostler did not even pause to beg for the usual piece of trade tobacco. We found the village humming with unusual activity, and Choke-cherry, every few rods, halted his pony and hoarsely harangued the people. These speeches had no point, I deduced from Flat Mouth's grim smile of contempt, but they killed the time which I believed to be precious.

Finally we were ready and rode beside Choke-cherry at the head of two hundred or more mounted warriors. They had decorated their ponies with white and red earth, some showing white or red hand-prints to advertise that their riders had grappled bare-handed with an enemy. Others were marked with stripes.

The riders, too, were painted, but they would have been very ferocious to behold even without any coloring, for the majority of them showed wide welts in the flesh, produced by pushing an arrow-head along under the skin. Many had several of these hideous ridges running from the hand to the shoulder and then down on the chest, where they ended in a series of circles. Nearly all had scalps hanging from their bridles or from the handles of their axes and spears. The women, also mounted, brought up the rear. These were uniformly tattooed with broad lines from the nose to the ears, and from the corners of the mouth down to the throat.

As we galloped along behind Choke-cherry, Flat Mouth festooned his scalps down the front of his robe, while I hung the Sioux medicine pouch on my breast. Several groups of young men now swung in ahead of us, riding ten abreast and chanting their war-songs and sounding their rattles. Choke-cherry produced the ceremonial pipe from a case carried across his saddle, and held it high in one hand so that it could not touch his horse.

Now, while we went in superior numbers to sign a peace pact, yet we moved in a compact body as if fearing an attack. Nor was this because of any ceremony. We were afraid of an attack. Word was given for the young men to cease racing their ponies and stay close with the main body, and more than one of the gun-bearers saw that his piece was properly primed and slipped an extra ball into his mouth.

When, within about a quarter of a mile of the Cheyenne camp, a score of warriors came racing out to meet us, on horse-flesh that was far superior to anything the Minnetarees owned, their animals' heads were cunningly concealed in masks representing buffalo and red deer heads. The riders were all young men and they rode up to us, shook hands and cried out greetings in their own language.

On beholding Miss Dearness they seemed strangely affected and lost much of their noisy manner. Flat Mouth and his decorations also impressed them, although he wore none of the finery the Minnetarees were displaying. But he had the proof of having been at hand-grips with the Sioux.

As they galloped back to their camp they repeatedly turned to gaze at us. Choke-cherry took all this to his own credit, but I knew it was the girl and her vivid hair that attracted these backward glances. She, too, was moved by the stirring spectacle, and her blue eyes flashed and sparkled and roamed back and forth to take in all the details of the lively panorama. For the moment she was forgetting the filth and the annoyance and was beholding only the barbaric grace of the riders, and the pictorial rioting of colors.

Choke-cherry, the old wind-bag, now halted the long line and rode from front to rear, pausing every rod to spout and roar his orders, determined to live his brief authority to the limit. He lectured them on the virtue of keeping their finery unsoiled, so as to do honor to their tribe. He exhorted them to carry themselves carefully, so as to give no offense and spoil the peace. He severely scolded a band of Mandans, who rode at one side and out of line. Flat Mouth said the Mandans had to stand much overbearing conduct from their allies, but added that, aside from the Borgne, no Minnetaree ventured beyond certain limits.

Because of Choke-cherry's love for speech-making I feared we would never make the camp and have the ceremony of adoption done with, but fortunately a great war-chief of the Cheyennes now dashed out to meet us on a white stallion and put an end to our leader's mouthing. This man was a magnificent specimen. He wore a blue coat, procured in trade with the Spaniards through some of the southern tribes, and a gaily striped blanket. He all but rode us down and had his horse's hoofs pawing the air over my head in a most disconcerting manner.

He shook hands with me and Miss Dearness, at whom he stared overlong, and with the Pillager. Choke-cherry, who was a few hundred feet behind us, now galloped up and fussily took over the management of the situation. The chief shook hands with him cordially, but his gaze alternated between the girl's hair and the stern cold face of the Pillager with his wealth of Sioux hair. The business of handshaking done with, he fell back, and a large number of his men rode forward and mingled with the Minnetarees and Mandans, shaking hands and shouting a welcome.

AT A signal from their chief the Cheyennes fell into long lines with a military precision and galloped to their camp. We followed at a sedate pace. When we arrived, the chief and several of the older men rode back and forth through the camp, reminding their people that the Minnetarees were their friends, that they were to be fed and protected from thieves. There were a hundred leather tents in the camp, white as snow and set in a horseshoe with the opening toward the north. The speech of the Cheyennes is much more pleasing to the ear than that of the Mandans or Minnetarees and reminded me much of our northern Crees.

Thus far all had gone smoothly. Then, like a bolt, a band of Cheyennes darted from their camp and rode like mad along our back trail. At first I supposed this to be one of their graceful maneuvers, but quickly perceived by Choke-cherry's excitement that something unusual was up. He yelped to his warriors and two-score wheeled their horses and started on a course parallel to that of the Cheyennes.

I rode up a low hill to discover the trouble and beheld two horsemen desperately riding to meet the Minnetarees before the Cheyennes could get to them. Behind me both the Cheyenne camp and the body of Minnetarees were in a boiling commotion. The women accompanying our party were hurriedly getting the horses to the rear. Choke-cherry was bleating madly. Flat Mouth and Miss Dearness galloped to join me.

"Be ready! We may have to ride fast from here. If we do we will strike for the Mouse without going back to the Mandan village," said the Pillager.

I asked for an explanation. He pointed to the two horsemen, now inside the double line of Minnetarees. I looked and recognized the head-dress of buffalo horns.

"Assiniboins!" I cried. "Why don't the Minnetarees kill them?"

"They came into the village. They can not be harmed. The Cheyennes are their deadly enemies. Knowing the Minnetarees are stronger today than the Cheyennes, they foolishly followed them out here. The Cheyennes want to kill them. The Minnetarees say they shall not be hurt. Instead of peace we may have a battle. If that happens we will ride for it."

Now the Minnetarees were returning, the two Assiniboins in their midst. The Cheyennes shouted furiously and gesticulated with their weapons as they demanded the surrender of the newcomers. Choke-cherry rode up to the Cheyenne chief and asked him to call his young men back. The chief offered ten of his best horses for the Assiniboins, and there was no logical reason—the dictates of humanity aside, of which the Minnetarees knew nothing—why the intruders should not have been given up. But according to the Indian reasoning the two were safe once they entered the village and so long as they remained in the village. As almost all the village had gone to visit the Cheyennes the Assiniboins followed our road and were held to be, theoretically, still in the village and entitled to protection.

It was a curious example of the power

of custom. The Minnetarees were determined to protect the two hostile Indians even if it cost them the friendship of the Cheyennes. The men were finally brought well within our lines, thrust into a small tent and told to keep out of sight. Next followed an hour of vehement speech-making. At last the Cheyennes said they would get their chance later. Choke-cherry was nervous and uneasy and at once began preparing for the ceremony.

Miss Dearness became so deeply interested in the Assiniboins that I made some comment upon it. She replied:

"They were with those who drove us down here. They are spies. They came to learn if we were here, and when we are likely to go. Their main body is in hiding somewhere near."

"They must not go back to tell what they've learned," I said.

"Oh, not murder," she protested.

"Self-defense," I grimly qualified.

I turned to the Pillager and found him perfectly composed. He said he had known the moment he beheld the two, that their errand on the Knife concerned us.

I said to the girl:

"It's very simple. I'll get word to the Cheyennes to watch the two and bag them if they leave the village. Flat Mouth shall tell them, as he talks the sign language."

"But the war-party outside waiting to catch us?" she murmured.

"Flat Mouth shall tell of that, too. The Cheyennes shall go and drive them away."

I began to feel rather obliged to the two fellows for coming in and revealing the unsuspected danger.

So far as I could observe, the wrangling over the Assiniboins terminated without any obvious gain made by either side except that the Minnetarees kept the two Indians alive. With the dissension smoothed away, next came the ceremony of completing the treaty. The terms were simple and accepted by both tribes. The alliance was to wage war on the Sioux and their allies. Choke-cherry, by formally adopting a Cheyenne youth as his son, would be creating binding ties between the tribes. The Cheyennes, however, were reluctant to proceed with the business.

Flat Mouth got hold of a Mandan and learned the Cheyennes were angry that Le Borgne did not consider the treaty of enough importance to be present. It had only needed the incident of the Assiniboins to bring this resentment to the surface. The medicine-tent was not up, nor had they formed a smaller ceremonial horseshoe of the white leather tents. After much arguing and oratory the medicine tent was finally erected.

Choke-cherry made a long-winded speech and called to him Two Crows, a Minnetaree chief, and gave to him the long pipestem he had so carefully guarded from being profaned by touching his horse. This stem was adorned with feathers, and Two Crows, in accepting it, danced grotesquely back and forth, while two young Minnetarees beat on a drum and rattled antelope hoofs together.

After a certain amount of prancing, came the ceremonial visit to the tent of the Cheyenne who was to be adopted. Two Crows went ahead with his thudding dance step, and behind him danced the men with the drum and the hoofs. We followed with Choke-cherry. At Choke-cherry's command three horses were brought along. Several pegs were pulled out, and the flaps of the tent drawn back so that the horses could be led inside. The three halters were placed in the hands of a very sullen looking young man who was seated opposite the entrance. Two Crows danced up and offered him the sacred stem. To the consternation of Choke-cherry the stem was haughtily waved aside. Choke-cherry tried to reason with him, but he would not come out of his sulks.

THE situation was growing serious. Flat Mouth gained the side of the Cheyenne war-chief, who was sardonically watching Choke-cherry's embarrassment, and talked rapidly with one hand masked by his robe. Only the chief could read his talk, and, as he comprehended, his eyes darted fire. Striding to the young man he spoke in his ear, whereat the stem was accepted. Choke-cherry and Two Crows now took him by the arms and led him to the medicine-tent and seated him beside some new red strouds—coarse blankets. Choke-cherry sat on his right and Two Crows on his left. The musicians continued their efforts, and a figure danced in with the head of a buffalo on his shoulders, the nostrils and mouth of which were stuffed with dried grass. He placed the skull of a bull on the ground opposite the Cheyenne.

Now came the gift-making, and again the Cheyennes held back. Some of the Minnetarees brought ammunition and placed it on the strouds, and the Cheyenne held the stem over it. Two Crows rose and addressed the Cheyennes, urging them to bring something to put under the stem. After much waiting three warriors brought in a few robes and some dressed leather and piled them on the ammunition. This encouraged the Minnetarees, and they gave three guns. The Cheyennes came back with three poor ponies. Choke-cherry growled and grunted in great wrath, and his followers brought two more guns and some corn and beans. This resulted in another sore-backed nag from the visitors.

Then did Choke-cherry explode and demand what the Cheyennes meant by putting worthless creatures under the stem when the Minnetarees were giving good guns and powder and ball. The Cheyennes replied they would bring good horses when more guns were put under the stem.

Choke-cherry forgot diplomacy and roundly accused the Cheyennes of plotting to induce the Minnetarees to give up their weapons so that they might be helpless before an attack. This accusation of treachery was immediately followed by the Cheyennes hurrying back to the tents. We waited, thinking they were gone to bring more ponies. Then the warriors outside the medicine tent began calling out loudly, and we ran after Choke-cherry and Two Crows and beheld the Cheyennes striking their tents and preparing to ride off.

The young man who was to have been adopted galloped by us, riding one of the gift nags, leading the others and carrying the guns and ammunition. More than one bow was drawn taut as he flew by, but Choke-cherry, although convulsed with rage, knew better than to let war come while his brother was absent, and his stern commands, liberally mixed with mention of his brother's name, saved the young man's life.

The Cheyennes rode off in a body. The peace treaty had fallen through because of the Assiniboins. Yet the Minnetarees did not seem to attribute any blame to them and treated them kindly as we rode back to the village. Before arriving at the huts Choke-cherry turned toward the river, a mile away. On reaching it he directed Two Crows to bring a white buffalo hide. Flat Mouth explained to me and the girl that Choke-cherry feared he had handled the peace treaty badly and anticipated his brother's anger. To guard against this he now proposed to sacrifice a precious white robe. Such a hide, as I have remarked before, is the most highly valued by the Minnetarees of all their possessions. I could understand how the chief's brother was considerably worked up.

Two Crows came galloping back, not with a whole hide, for that was a liberality that even the gods had no right to expect, but a long strip. This seemed to answer perfectly, however, and was soon placed in a deep hole in the river and weighted down with rocks. Choke-cherry then made a long speech in which he said he knew what was to blame for the Cheyennes' behavior, which he promised to duly report to his brother. Having done all he could to placate his gods, he morosely led the way home.

"You talked with the Cheyenne chief?" I murmured to Flat Mouth.

"He is Red Arrow, a brave warrior. He will wait three days to go with us to the Mouse."

"Why is he willing to do that?" I curiously asked.

"He knows I will pay him. He will make a good trade," was the evasive answer.

Choke-cherry halted at the first hut and, as we rode up, he glared at me viciously and shouted something. The Pillager interpreted—

"I know what stopped me from making peace with the Cheyennes."

"What was it?" I asked.

"Bad medicine."

"What was the medicine?" I knew what he would say before he spoke.

"The hair of the white woman," he grunted, switching his malignant gaze to Miss Dearness.

I warmly replied he was a fool and some other things, and that no treaty would be made with the Minnetarees when they took the Assiniboin snakes along with them.

"My brother is a very wise man. We shall see," he replied as he rode away.

The girl had interpreted his look and had heard Flat Mouth's Chippewa translation, and her hand was cold as ice as she rode closer and placed it on mine and whispered—

"It all comes back—my fear."

"Don't you worry a bit," I soothed. "We'll get out of here flying inside of twelve hours."

In my heart, however, a deadly chill was growing.

It was now dusk, and, after leaving our ponies at the corral, I escorted Miss Dearness to the hut and lighted some bark in the fire-hole to drive away the gloom. Then I told her that we had better remain where we were until morning as the ride down the river would be dangerous. Surrounding the village were innumerable pits, eight feet or more deep, which the women filled with corn and beans each Fall. These were all open, and to get clear of the place at night was to risk a broken leg or neck.

"But we must get away tonight," she fiercely insisted. "Any danger but this." She waved her hand to encompass the whole village. "You heard what he said about my medicine spoiling the treaty. I care nothing for that, but there is another danger. Oh, Mr. Franklin, you've been very good and patient with me—but get me out of here tonight!"

"Very well, we'll go tonight, but we can't return to the Mandans. We must risk crossing the Missouri at the mouth of the Knife and striking northeast. If we waited until tomorrow and started from the Mandans we might find a band of Cheyennes waiting to act as escort. The chief told the Pillager he would see us to the Mouse."

"I'd rather start from here tonight and travel alone than wait any longer," she said. "Perhaps Flat Mouth could swing to one side and pick up the Cheyennes. If not, then a ride for it, and a clean, quick death at the worst."

"There must be no talk of death," I rebuked. "We'll go and get through. I was only thinking of the difficulties in getting the horses across the Missouri, but with a bull-boat we ought to be able to tow them over, one at a time. Rest easy while I go and find the Pillager and arrange for him to get the horses from the corral."

I had passed through the door, closed it, and had heard the heavy bar drop across it, when a terrific screech rang out a few huts away and in the direction of the river. The cry was caught up and repeated. I stood undecided, my thumb resting on the hammer of my gun. The door opened back of me and she was beside me, a hand resting on my shoulder, her head tilted as she sought to read my face in the darkness. The village was now in an uproar.

"The Cheyennes must be attacking in force," I muttered.

"It's something very serious," she whispered. "Do you think you can manage to get the horses up here?"

"Stay inside! Let no one in," I said, stepping out and blundering between the huts, where the path in places was only a foot in width.

I PASSED between two huts and bumped into an Indian. His hands struck my chest to push me aside. Then the Pillager's voice was whispering—

"So it is you. I knew the cloth."

"What is the trouble? You've been running?"

The last deduction was not because his breathing was beyond normal, but because in clutching his wrists I felt his pulse racing.

"The Assiniboin spies will not go back to tell what they saw here," he hissed in my ear.

"Good God! You've killed them?" I muttered.

"Killed both. I promised the Cheyenne chief their scalps if he would give us warriors to go with us to the Mouse. I told you he would make a good trade."

"But they'll be after you!" I softly cried.

"Choke-cherry thinks the Cheyennes crept in and did it."

"It won't do for you to be seen. It might make them suspicious. Don't tell the white woman. Stand in front of the hut. I will bring up the horses. We must cross the Missouri at the mouth of the Knife and ride for it."

"The Cheyennes will be waiting near the Mandan village," he protested.

"And it's impossible to go down the river. We would lose too much time. If the Minnetarees chase us they will take that direction."

"Ho! Eshkebugecoshe, Chief of the Pillager Chippewas, needs no help in saving the white woman except the white woman's medicine."

He thumped his breast and might have

broken into song if I had not quieted him.

I set off, making my way toward the center of the pandemonium which seemed to focus around the corral. Lights were now springing up in the open places, the naked children dancing and piling on fuel and looking like so many devil's whelps.

Before I reached the corral the village was well illumined. I met Choke-cherry, who bawled out something I could not have understood even if I knew his language. But as he carried a gun and had his mouth stuffed with balls, I assumed he was expecting an attack from the Cheyennes. He caught my arm and led me to the door of a hut and ordered the mob to stand one side. As the command was obeyed I looked down a narrow lane of humanity and beheld the two Assiniboins. They had been killed with a knife, and both were scalped.

I slashed my fingers across my wrist, the sign for the Cheyennes, and he nodded. He stopped to harangue the crowd and I worked clear of the shambles and hurried on to the corral.

I reached the corral and was startled to behold a line of mounted men riding down a slight rise and toward me, being well within the light of the many fires. Although they were continually descending the rise, the head of the line never reached the corral. I watched for a minute, greatly puzzled. Then a stentorian voice rose with such tremendous volume as to carry a great distance. It was repeated several times and was answered from the center of the village. In another moment several Indians came running by the corral, one of them swinging a torch. I recognized Choke-cherry and the Pillager in the group.

I called out to him and I knew he heard me, yet he kept on with the others to find the man with the loud voice. Knowing he would return when he had finished his errand, I proceeded to pick out our animals. As I led them out of the enclosure a warrior caught my arm and pointed interrogatively at the nags. I pointed out toward the open plain and then made the sign for Cheyenne and indicated I was taking the horses into a hut. He nodded and hurried on. I started to lead them away and a hand fell on my shoulder, and the Pillager was wrenching the halter ropes from my hands and hurriedly driving the ponies back into the corral.

"Why do you do that?" I demanded.

"Bad medicine at work," he gloomily answered. "Le Borgne comes back from the hunt. Did you not hear his voice? When he heard the noise in the village he knew something was wrong and has thrown a hundred of his hunters around the village with orders to shoot any one trying to leave it. We must stay."

Without a word I followed him back through the excited throngs. Some perverse agency seemed to be thwarting us. Something of the girl's strange fear began to assail me. It was not Le Borgne, for a ball from my double-barrel would nicely eliminate him. It was, rather, that the whole village stood for ruthless and brutal domination through physical strength. When I came to the hut, tapped on the door, and gave my name, I was confronting the hardest task I had ever encountered.

TO BE CONCLUDED.

THE SPIDER

by Arthur O. Friel

Author of "The Snake," and "The Sloth."

I WOULD not attack that spider again, *senhor*, if I were you. You have seen for yourself that you can not hit him. No matter how quickly you strike, he is inches away when the blow falls.

Those huge, bird-killing spiders all are incredibly swift. I have heard that not even a bullet is fast enough to kill one—that at the flash of the gun he jumps so quickly that the whole seven inches of him is out of danger when the shot strikes. Whether that be true or not, I know you will never hit him with your fist; you will only tire yourself out. Besides, he may grow angry and attack you in return. His fangs are half an inch long, *senhor*, and he is full of poison. It is not wise to risk his springing at you.

This is an odd place to find such a monster—here in the middle of the broad Amazon, on a steamer outward bound toward the Atlantic. Yet strange creatures sometimes come aboard these river-boats while they are tied up at the bank. Some of them are harmless, and some are deadly. And not all of the deadly things are found on the outgoing steamers, nor are they all bred here in the jungle.

Sometimes they come up the river from the outside and are the more deadly because they are human. The memory of one of them came into my mind just now while I watched that great spider leaping aside from your blows. He, too, was called the "Spider," that man, though his name was Schwartz.

What is that? You say that *schwarz* means "black"? That is very droll, *senhor*, for the Spider was black. Black of hair, black of beard, black of eye he was—yes, and black of heart, too, though at first we did not know that. We called him Spider because he looked like one. His little eyes were set close together with a sort of spidery look in them. His body was small and bunchy, while his arms were long and thin and covered with black hair. His legs were short and crooked. Yet he could run amazingly fast on those little legs; that made him seen all the more like a spider. And later he made himself a spider's lair—and came to a spider's end.

An up-river boat brought him to us one day, and with him a small brown bag and a rifle. He had no letters to Coronel Nunes, owner of the great rubber estate where I worked, nor anything else to show who he was or whence he had come. The *coronel*, however, received him with the courtesy he shows to all who come to him; and when this man told him he had had another bag, containing letters of introduction and other things of value, but that it had been stolen from him on the boat, the *coronel* believed him—or at any rate seemed to, for theft is a thing that may happen to any man in almost any place.

Schwartz boldly made himself at home there at the headquarters and talked vaguely about looking over the country for the people he said he represented. He went out in the jungle with us men and saw all he could see. Always he carried two weapons—the rifle, and a pistol.

It may be a foolish fancy, *senhores*, but I have sometimes thought that a man may be judged by his weapons, and not only the man himself, but the country whence he comes—for a man usually carries the weapons made in his own land. Now you two Americans, I have noticed, carry with you that flat pistol made by the Senhor Colt, which you say was used by your army in the war in Europe. There is about it a square, solid look which fits well with the things I have observed about you and with what I have heard about your great country. Also, the shape of that pistol is such that it seems to say—

"I do not seek trouble with any man, but if any man wants it—I am ready."

Your Winchesters, too, have something of that same air of solid readiness.

The guns of the Spider had a much different appearance. The pistol looked venomous; it leaned forward from the ugly butt to the thin muzzle, as if always eager to kill. It reminded me of a striking snake. The name of it, he once told me, was a Loo—let me see—ah yes, that is it, *senhor*—a Luger. The rifle, too, looked wicked, but I can not remember its name; it does not matter. But that pistol and the look of the spidery man who carried it were such that, when he was following behind me in the bush, I got a cold feeling between my shoulder-blades, as if death were about to strike me in the back.

My mates, too, said that they had the same feeling when he was behind them; yet he gave us no real cause for it. He did not bluster nor threaten us by word or act. Indeed, he was very quiet. He had the spider's way of remaining still in one place for a long time, watching everything and making no move. It might be our work that he watched, or it might be something in the jungle that aroused his interest; but whatever it was, you felt that when he stopped looking at it he had seen everything about it and remembered it all.

One thing that amused us was his habit of watching other spiders—real spiders of the bush, which we often met. No matter what sort of spider it might be he would study it and learn its ways and how it lived and got its prey. When he did this we would wink at one another and laugh behind our hands, and one of my mates named Pedro—a tall, handsome young fellow who was very droll—would pretend to pounce on something, and then say under his breath:

"Take care, little spider, the big Spider will eat you!"

It seemed very funny to us at the time. But later on things came about which made it not funny at all.

After he had been among us for some time, another boat came. It brought us welcome guests: the *coronel's* daughter, who had journeyed all the way from Rio to visit him, and her cousin, a gentleman of Rio, Senhor Affonso da Fonseca. Every year the Senhorita Flora made this long trip from the great city where she was receiving the finest education the *coronel's* wealth could give her, to see her lonely old father. And though he would never allow her to remain very long, lest she become ill from the climate or meet some mischance from snakes or other things, we all knew that he looked forward to these short visits of hers as the brightest days of all the year.

We knew, too, that he planned eventually to make his own home again in Rio, where he had lived until his wife died. And we knew also that Senhor Affonso, who was somewhat older than the senhorita, had a deeper feeling for her than that of a cousin, and that, though he accompanied her partly because he was interested in our rubber country and partly because he felt it his duty to protect her on the long journey, he came more for the pleasure of being with her. We were glad of this, for she was a handsome, gracious girl—the true daughter of her father—while the *senhor* was every inch a man and would make her a fine husband. The *coronel* himself approved the match.

NOW it happened just at this time that I met with a rather bad accident in the bush—my right leg was cut by a *machete*—and so I had to go back to headquarters to let the injury heal. My old *coronel* had a very friendly feeling for me because in past days I had done some dangerous things for him which many men would not have done. So, while I was recovering from my hurt, he often had me come to the house and sit and talk to him, and, being there, I saw a number of things.

For one thing, I noticed that the Spider stopped going into the jungle so much. He stayed around the headquarters, sitting quiet for hours in that spidery way of his and watching the *senhorita* or Senhor Affonso. Sometimes he talked, in his throaty foreign way, and the others answered him with all politeness, but I could see that none of them liked him.

The *coronel* was displeased at the way the Spider's eyes followed his daughter, and the girl herself avoided him. Senhor Affonso, though, was much interested sometimes by the black-bearded man's talk of things he had studied in the jungle, and now and then he went out with him to see those things for himself. At such times I always felt uneasy, and Senhorita Flora, too, kept watching anxiously until they returned.

Mind you, *senhores*, the Spider never had done anything to make us distrust him. But dark crimes can easily be committed when two men are alone in the bush, and we knew that Senhor Affonso was wealthy and that, no doubt, he had a tempting sum of *milreis* with him; and, as I have said, there was that about the Spider which made one feel that it would not be well to trust him too far. So I always felt relieved when the Rio gentleman came back unharmed, and I knew the *senhorita* did also, though she never spoke of what was in her mind.

Then one day a man of ours reported seeing a splendid black jaguar in the forest, and Senhor Affonso and the Spider went to hunt it. They made the longest trip they had yet taken, for they were gone two days. This time we were more at ease about them, however, for by the *coronel's* order two of our men went with them—the man who had seen the jaguar and another who was a good hunter.

Not long after they departed, another boat came. It was the one which had brought the Spider to us. My leg was better now, though still stiff, and I limped down to watch the unloading of the supplies. As I started, the *coronel* asked me to request the captain to come up for a moment. I did so and thought no more of it. After the boat went, though, I noticed that the *coronel* seem disturbed. At times his eyes would snap angrily and then he would walk up and down, his face wrinkled in thought. I asked no questions, of course, but after the Spider and Senhor Affonso returned I soon learned what was the matter.

They had found the jaguar, and brought with them his great, glossy hide, which Senhor Affonso proudly showed to the girl and her father.

"It shall go back to Rio with us," he said, looking at Flora, and there was that in his face which added: "And some day, beloved, it shall be in our home."

She smiled and blushed a little, dropping her eyes.

I do not know why I did it, but I glanced at the Spider to see if he watched this. I saw he did and that a nasty expression crossed his face. The *coronel* saw this too, and his mouth tightened. When the others started into the house he said—

"Senhor Schwartz, I would speak with you."

I turned to go away. But, as I have said, my leg was stiff, and I had to walk slowly—and I will admit that I did not try very hard to hasten, for I knew the *coronel* was about to say something worth hearing. Before I had gone far the old gentleman spoke:

"*Senhor*, you have now made me quite a long visit. I have greatly enjoyed your companionship and I am grieved that in this poor home of mine I have been unable to offer you better entertainment. I trust, however, that the little I could do to show you the workings of the estate has been of some assistance to you, and that on your departure you will carry with you many pleasant memories."

The Spider said nothing. So the *coronel* added—

"It is with sorrow that I learn that you are to leave us on the next boat."

After a pause the Spider said:

"Ya, I see. It is because I lost that bag mit my papers."

"Pardon, *senhor*," said the *coronel*, "but the *Aurora* was here yesterday, and as you are my guest I asked the captain if any trace of your black bag, of which you told me, had been found. He told me, *senhor*, that you had no black bag whatever—only the brown one which you brought here, and that nothing had been taken from you. No doubt there is some mistake. Yet I have known this captain for years, and I know him to be honest and truthful."

There was another pause. Just as I passed out of hearing the Spider said—

"He is a —— liar, but I will go."

I heard him walk into the house.

As no boat was expected for a time, things went on as before. I said nothing of what I had overheard and I know the *coronel* did not tell the others, for he is the very soul of hospitality and it had cost him an unpleasant struggle to do what he had to do. The Spider went out into the bush a few times alone and returned and talked of various things he had seen. Then one morning he and Senhor Affonso went out together, to look at something or other this black-hearted man said he had found.

I watched them go and I became more uneasy than ever before. I wanted to follow, but my leg was not yet good enough to let me travel easily and noiselessly; so I looked about, and my eye fell on young Pedro, the droll fellow who used to pretend to devour spiders. I beckoned to him and whispered to him to follow the pair and keep out of sight. He did so at once.

TIME passed, and a sort of drowsiness had crept upon me, when there came a sound—a sound like a shot, some distance away and muffled by the bush. I sprang awake and listened. Suddenly I remembered that Pedro had not taken his rifle—only the *machete* he always carried at his belt. Senhor Affonso, though, had a gun with him and he might be shooting at some animal.

Before long there came two other shots. These were nearer than the first and sounded like the spiteful crack of the Luger. I got up and went to my quarters to get my rifle. Senhorita Flora who had heard the shots too, come out and called to me—

"Lourenço, what is it?"

But I made no answer and went on as fast as a lame man could.

I was just coming out with the gun when Flora's name was called from the edge of the forest. There stood the Spider.

"Come quickly, *senhorita*," he said. "Affonso has met with an accident."

She started running toward him. I called—

"Do not go, *senhorita!* Wait!"

But she kept on, and I began to run too. Then the Spider stopped us both. He fired at me.

The bullet missed me so narrowly that I felt it pass my face. I dodged, my clumsy stiff leg twisted, and I fell sprawling. When I looked up the girl had whirled and was running back to the house.

The Spider, who thought he had killed me, was running after her with all his spidery speed. My rifle had fallen from my hand, and while I was getting it he caught her. He dragged her back toward the jungle. She struggled to escape, and he struck her so hard that he dazed her. Then he picked her up and ran, but I had my rifle now.

I fired from where I lay, aiming low, trying to hit his crooked legs and so avoid injuring Flora. But I shot hurriedly and missed him. Still, my shooting stopped him, for when he saw I was alive he swung the girl toward me and, using her as a shield, fired at me again.

As you perhaps know, a man lying down is hard to hit, but his bullet ripped across my shoulders and tore the shirt from my back and burned my skin. I could not shoot again without striking the *senhorita,* so I did not try.

Then came a burst of fire from the house, where the *coronel* had seized weapons. Now he came bounding out like a jaguar, with a pistol in each hand spitting flame and lead, as he ran. Somewhere behind me, too, a rifle barked, fired by some man about the place.

Of course, both the *coronel* and the workman shot high, lest they kill Flora. But the Spider, thinking only of himself, had no time to realize this. Finding himself under fire from two directions and hearing yells of rage as other men ran for their guns, he suddenly dropped the girl and ran, diving into the bush.

I shot at him again as he fled, but again I missed. Then we all hastened to Flora, whom the *coronel* had caught up in his arms. For the moment we forgot everything but her. Then, still stunned by the blow of the Spider, she moaned—

"Affonso!"

We all started and looked at one another, and I said—

"Yes, Senhor Affonso must have been shot—and Pedro, too."

I explained how I had sent Pedro to follow. The *coronel* snapped:

"Go, men, and find them! And find that—that Schwartz, too!"

We growled. The Spider would not come back alive if we found him. But we did not find him, for he had vanished. We pressed on to find our own people. I could not keep up with the others, but I was not far behind when they met Pedro. He came staggering down an old *estrada,* his face twisted with pain, and he bore the body of Senhor Affonso.

At first we believed that body to be dead, for it hung limp and there were two bullet-holes in it, but while we were cutting down branches to make a litter Senhor Affonso stirred and moaned. Pedro cried out joyously:

"He lives! The *senhor* lives!"

Then he dropped, did Pedro, fainting from loss of blood, for he, too, had been shot by the Spider, and his wound was bad, near the shoulder. So now we had two men to carry home.

As I learned later, this was what had happened:

The Spider had told Senhor Affonso he had found a trap-door spider's nest which was quite the most wonderful thing he had ever seen, and the *senhor*, greatly interested, went with him into a place where no men were working. There the Spider pointed to a hole at the base of a large tree, with thick spider-webbing across it, and said that was it.

If the city gentleman had been better acquainted with spiders he would have known that no trap-door spider would ever make such a nest, but that it would be concealed so that it could not be seen at all. But he went up to it, and then the man Schwartz said—

"Look closely, Affonso, and see how a spider acts when he is cornered!"

Then he shot him in the back.

The only thing that saved the *senhor* was that, even as he bent to look, he sensed something treacherous in the Spider's words and turned to see his face. The bullet struck him before he had turned half-way, but he had twisted so far that, instead of going into his heart, it went through him sidewise and came out under his right arm. The shock threw him forward and his head struck hard against the tree, knocking him senseless.

The Spider, thinking him dead, swiftly robbed him of everything valuable—though he did not get so much as he probably expected, for the *senhor* had put most of his money in the *coronel's* safe soon after his arrival. Then he dashed back to carry off the handsome Senhorita Flora, but on the way he met Pedro.

Pedro, not wishing the pair to know he was there, had followed at some distance and, though he heard the shot, he did not see the shooting and could not be sure of what it meant. So, with his *machete* ready, he sought to stop the Spider and question him. Without a word the Spider shot him, too, firing twice. The first bullet knocked him down in the thick bush and the second missed. When he struggled up again the Spider was gone. Since the first thing to do was to find Senhor Affonso, he went and found him.

FOR some time it seemed that both Pedro and the *senhor* would die. But both were strong, and at last they recovered. While they lay there we hunted the Spider, but found nothing at all; he had disappeared as if he never had been there. It was during this time, too, that we learned what he meant by his double-tongued advice to Senhor Affonso to see what a cornered spider would do, for there came a boat, and with it two quiet, common-looking men who talked with the *coronel* and went out into the bush with our men. They finally left without telling their business to any one except the *coronel*. When they had gone we learned with surprize that they were police. We also found that they sought the Spider, and that he was wanted in Para for murder, and at Manaos for—worse than murder.

So you see that though he could not know the law was so close behind him, he did know he could not go back down the river on the next boat. He had reached the last place where he could live among men, and now there was no place left for him but the jungle.

My leg was well long before the *senhor* and Pedro were, and I went back to work. I heard, though, that Senhor Affonso vowed he would stay there until he had hunted down the man who had shot him and assailed the lady Flora, if it took the rest of his life.

The *senhorita* was even more bitter against that man than Affonso himself—not so much because he had attacked her as because he had nearly killed her sweetheart. That is the way of women. Yet she pleaded with him not to seek the Spider, as he might be killed in doing so. The *coronel*, too, pointed out that he was city-bred and not fitted for man-hunting in such terrible country as ours, that the Spider must have perished in the jungle, and that even the police had abandoned the idea of looking for him. Pedro, for whom the *senhor* now had much affection, also urged him to change his mind, and said:

"Leave him to me, *senhor*. He is mine as well as yours, and I know the forest far better than you. If ever I find him, he dies."

And so he was dissuaded, and finally he and Flora went back to Rio.

WE HAD long given up the Spider as dead, for he had not much ammunition and no way of getting more. Thus his weapons would soon become useless, and then he could kill no game to eat. We had decided he was dead, I say, when strange things began to occur. The first of these was the disappearance of Custodio Barros.

We were working far out from headquarters at the time, in new rubber land, and we needed more supplies. Custodio was sent down the river in his canoe to get them. A long time went by, and he did not return.

Then we sent another man. Before he had gone far he met two boats coming up from headquarters, and when he asked what ailed Custodio, the men in the boats were astonished, for they thought he had returned to us. They said he had come, got his supplies and started back; since then nothing had been seen or heard of him. Their own action in bringing more supplies had nothing to do with him, but was the usual arrangement. They said they would keep a sharp lookout on the way back to see if any trace of him could be found, but they discovered no trace at all.

This, of course, caused much talk and argument among us. Custodio was an honest fellow and even if he had not been he would hardly have run away with a few supplies. He might have gone ashore and been killed by a snake or a jaguar, or he might have been drowned, or devoured by alligators or *piranhas*. None of those things, however, would have destroyed his canoe, and the empty canoe would have been seen by some one. It might be that Indians had killed him and taken all he had, but this did not seem likely. Each of us had his own idea of what might have happened, but none of us knew anything more than the fact that he was lost.

Gumercindo Penna was the next. He was a steady, thrifty man who had worked among us for a long time and had never gambled. He had accumulated a large account with the *coronel*. He had a little family at a place well down the river, and now the longing for home had grown too strong in him, and he was going out.

The *coronel*, who is always very kind to those who serve him well, not only paid him his due but gave him a handsome present besides, so that he was quite rich for a man of this region. Yet, partly because he was so thrifty and partly because the home fever was burning strong in him, he would not wait for a regular boat and go home as a paying passenger, but started at once in his own canoe.

Since he was going down-river, the *coronel* asked him to bear a message to some of our men working some distance below headquarters, telling them to come in, as he had decided to send them into another place. Gumercindo gladly promised to do so.

The men did not come in, and, after waiting awhile, the *coronel* sent another man with the same message. This time the men came promptly. They said, *senhores*, that Gumercindo not only had given them no message, but he had never passed their camp!

At this the *coronel* was much perplexed, and after turning things over in his mind he sent two men all the way to Gumercindo's home to see if he had arrived there. He had not. Nobody knew anything at all about him. Nowhere between the headquarters and his home was there any sign of him. He, too, had disappeared.

This alarmed and angered all of us. Searching parties went out with orders to find the lost man or some trace of him, and they hunted all along both banks and sent word far down the river to seek him. But nothing was found; neither Gumercindo himself, nor his canoe, nor even his hat.

After that no man traveled alone. We felt that some terrible thing was on the river, though what it might be we could not guess. We made note of one thing, though—that both of these men had disappeared with something of value. Custodio had vanished with some supplies; Gumercindo with money. Men who had nothing were not molested. Still, the fact that both of those lost men had been alone when they were destroyed made us want to travel in pairs, whether we had anything or not. For a time this worked well.

Nothing happened to any of us, except the usual accidents and hazards of our work.

Then came something that struck dread deeper into our hearts. Two men disappeared together, and with them a whole boat-load of valuable supplies. One of them, Lucas Maciel, was a rather simple fellow and slow of thought, but the other, Saldanha Saraiva, was a man of quick wit and much experience on the river, whose only weakness was a fondness for women. They were bound up-stream when they were last seen, and somewhere between that point and our workings the mysterious Death which haunted the river reached out and seized them, their boat and all they had. As before, no trace was left behind.

While we were searching along the banks and back in the jungle for any sign of what had happened to these mates of ours, a fifth man was swallowed up. Antonio Maciel, he was—a brother of Lucas. This time the Death struck not on the water, but in the jungle.

Antonio was one of several men who were beating through the bush, strung out in a long line with wide spaces between them, and he was at the end of the line nearest the stream. After a time the man next to him found that Antonio was not answering his calls. He cut his way toward where Antonio should have been. He was not there, nor had he reached that place. There was no trace of him. He was gone, as if the ground had opened under him and closed again. The last sign of him was a place where he had slashed some vines with his *machete*.

This was too much. Men now feared to work—to go in canoes—to do anything. They were not cowards, these comrades of mine, but the mystery and silence of this awful Death that left no trace was more than they could stand. Some crossed themselves and said it was no mortal thing, but a demon. No man knew when or where it would strike him down, for it had seized Antonio, who was on land and had nothing but his weapons, just as it had devoured the men on the water who had money or supplies. Though our work went on, we toiled always with a cold feeling on our backs, and went always by twos or threes. There was not one of us who did not shudder at the mention of this mysterious Death.

NOW Pedro had recovered from his bullet-wound and was back at work with me, we had many talks about this thing which we called the Death, but none of them got us anywhere. Yet, through these talks, we got into the habit of being together, and where one of us went the other went too. So when I was told to go to headquarters and fetch back some things that were needed in our work, Pedro came with me. At the headquarters I got what we had been sent for and, as the things were few, I gave them over to Pedro to put into the canoe while I told the *coronel* how all was going at our *tamo* up the river. When I came out and saw our canoe I was astonished. It seemed to be full of supplies.

"What is this, Pedro?" I asked.

He smiled his odd smile, and answered:

"It is bait. The boxes and bags are filled with trash." And as I stared at him he added: "The Death strikes at men with full canoes, Lourenço. I would see what this Death looks like."

"Are you mad?" I cried angrily. "Is there not danger enough without inviting more?"

"Perhaps so," he said, his brown eyes dancing. "If you are afraid, we will leave this bait behind."

Of course that silenced me, as he knew it would. We pushed off and paddled away with our worthless cargo. After we swung into our long-distance stroke some of his recklessness crept into me too, and I began to look forward to meeting the Death and fighting it.

The only thing we did meet, however, was far from what we half expected. At a place where a slow, quiet creek flowed into the river, a soft call came to us, and as we looked we saw standing there an Indian woman. We held the canoe steady and stared at her.

She was a magnificent woman, for she was tall and shapely, deep-bosomed and full-hipped, and she looked as strong as a man; her face, too, was really handsome. She laughed and beckoned to us. Pedro laughed back, waved his hand and asked her what she would have of us; she made some answer, but we could not understand it, for we did not know her tongue. Then she waved to us again to come ashore.

Pedro, who was in the bow, drove his paddle into the river to do so, but I backed water and held the canoe where it was, for, though the things we had been sent for were few, they were badly needed at our *tambo* and we were under orders to waste no time. When Pedro scowled at me I reminded him of this and told him I had had enough of his foolishness and that we would go on at once. Still, we stayed there a few minutes, out on the water, while he and the woman talked back and forth without understanding each other at all. Then we went on, paddling fast to make up for lost time.

The sight of this woman had surprized us much, for we knew of no Indians along that stream—their country was farther west and south. Had she been a man it would not have seemed so strange, for the savages are rovers and hunt for long distances away from their homes; but a woman, all alone on the bank, was something to be wondered at. We puzzled about her as we went on and concluded that a band of the Indians must be living near the stream for a time, as she certainly would never be there unless some men were about. As I have said, she was the only person we saw on all our trip. The mysterious Death never molested us. So, when we neared our journey's end, I said:

"Let us now throw this bait overboard. It has caught no fish."

"Very well," said Pedro, and we drew up to the bank to do so.

But suddenly, as he reached for the first bag, a strange look dawned in his face, as if a great thought had struck him.

"Lourenço!" he said hoarsely. "That woman—I wonder if she too was bait!"

I frowned at him, wondering what he meant, but he did not explain. Instead, he said:

"We will not throw away our bait. We will hide it and use it again. Say nothing of the woman, Lourenço. I have an idea, and later you shall know what it is."

So we hid all the trash beside the water, and marked a tree so that we could find it again, and went on to the *tambo*.

Now in this gang of ours there was a silent, surly man who had been a lone rubber-picker in very wild parts of Peru and Bolivia, and who knew Indian tongues. He was said to be a refugee from both countries because he had killed men there, and most of us left him alone as much as possible.

Now I observed, however, that Pedro was with him a good deal. Pedro was the sort of man who can make friends with any one, and even this sour, suspicious killer liked him. What they talked about Pedro did not tell me, and I asked no questions. This went on for a time, and then one night Pedro took the gang-boss aside and talked with him. After that he came and told me to clean my rifle and prepare to go down-river, and in the morning we went.

At the place where the marked tree stood we got our bait again, and arranged it so that it looked much different than before. Then we went on down-stream, ready for anything that might come, but nothing came.

When we reached the place where we had seen the woman, we held the canoe, and Pedro gave an odd cry like a bird. I recognized the call as one he had been practising since he began talking with the Peruvian outlaw. We listened, but neither heard nor saw anything, so we went on. At intervals he called again, and at last there floated back the same call from the jungle. We stopped the canoe where it it was. Pedro called again, and again came the reply. Soon a figure appeared among the trees, and we saw the savage woman.

"Hold your rifle ready, Lourenço," he whispered.

I seized the gun and cocked it, watching the shore. He began to talk to the woman, using strange words which meant nothing to me, but which she evidently understood, for she responded at once. Now I saw why he had spent so much time with the man from the west who knew Indian languages. He had been learning how to speak the savage dialect himself.

She laughed, that woman, and chattered eagerly to Pedro and waved to us to come to her. But that we did not do. Pedro shook his head, and once he pointed up-stream and said more things.

After a time he began to paddle again and went on down the river and left her behind. We passed around a bend and then another, and when we were well out of sight, he turned the canoe toward the shore—across the river from the bank where the woman had stood. At a good place we landed, and there he arranged our cargo again to suit himself. He laughed at all my questions and made no answer, but his eyes sparkled, and his face was alive with his thoughts, though at times he looked a little puzzled and doubtful, too.

When he was ready we went back upstream. This time he gave no call, and we paddled steadily until we reached that place where first we had seen the woman. There he turned toward the little creek, and as we neared it I saw her again. Pedro had made tryst with her and now he stepped out on land and went boldly to her. I stayed in the canoe.

"I think there is no danger here, Lourenço," he said, "but be alert."

He talked more with her while I watched them and everything around them. As before, she chattered and laughed with him, and I could see that she admired him much, which was not strange, for men admired him too—he was so tall and straight and strong.

I saw also that he was questioning her, and that she was not answering all his questions. Once she wanted to look at the stuff in our boat, but I warned her off, and Pedro himself held her arm and stopped her.

Finally he stepped back into the canoe, and we went on up-river until we were out of sight. There we picked a place to camp and stayed there that night, lighting no fire.

Before we slept, he told me that the woman was living in the jungle with a man, but what sort of a man he was or where he lived she would not tell him. This man, she said, was away somewhere that day, and what he was doing she did not know. When Pedro asked her if she would lead us to the man's camp she refused. Then she asked what we had in our boat, and he told her they were supplies for a new camp. It was then that she tried to look at them and we prevented her. After that she asked where this new camp was, and he told her at a certain place well up the river, where there really was no camp and where none was intended. In leaving her, he told her he would not work the next day because it was his birthday, and he would come to meet her again at the same place.

"I ask you again, Pedro," I said, "what is the meaning of all this? And why are you so interested in this savage woman?"

"Lourenço," he answered, "we are now not very far from headquarters. All of our five friends whom the Death has struck have disappeared not far from headquarters—or so I believe. The place where we first saw that woman is not far from headquarters. The place where she answered my call today is still nearer to headquarters. More than that, she answered from a spot very near where Antonio Maciel vanished. Now there is a riddle for you to puzzle over. I am going to sleep."

IN THE morning we took out all our bait and put it into the bush. Pedro sat a while and watched the creeping shadows, and, when it was time, we went down the river again. As we paddled along I said:

"Pedro, if this woman has anything to do with the Death, as you believe, then we are fools to meet her again where you agreed, for we are likely to go into a trap and never come out."

He laughed and replied—

"If the Death is what I think it is, it is now up the river seeking that new camp of which I told her, and so it can do us no harm."

He seemed to be right, for the woman awaited us, and they talked again for some time, and nothing at all happened. I could see that she was very much taken with my handsome companion, but, as before, he could not make her answer all his questions. After we left her he said:

"She is no fool, Lourenço, for all that she seems so simple. Still, I think that in the end we shall learn what we want to know."

When I suggested that we hasten matters by going straight to the place where she had answered his bird-cry and searching the jungle there, he snorted and replied:

"Oh, yes, surely. That was just what Antonio was doing—searching the bush at that place. And there were more men in his party than in ours. Have patience, comrade, and do not jump in the dark."

This silenced me.

We hid for the rest of that day and that night, and then we went to meet her again—for the last time, as it turned out. She seemed sulky, and when he tried to put her in better humor she answered crossly, and we saw that something had happened since we left her. Yet Pedro finally coaxed her into a cheery mood and she began to smile and give him soft looks.

Later I learned that she had blurted out that he was lying to her because there was no camp where he had said. Of course, that instantly showed him that his shrewd guess had been right, and that she or her man had sought that camp. He was not foolish enough to let her see his thought, however, and he told her that the plans had been changed and the new camp was being made at another place. After that they talked on for some time, and he told her how handsome she was and so on.

I was crouched in the canoe, as usual, watching everything like a cat, and listening. All at once my ear caught a tiny sound in the bush—a soft rustle as if something had brushed stealthily against some leaves. Pedro and the woman were talking low, and I put all my attention on that little sound. It might be only a wandering breeze, a crawling snake or some other natural thing, but I had to be sure. Soon I heard it again, very soft, and I knew something was creeping nearer to us. Then, at a place where the tangle was very thick, I saw a slight movement caused by something about the height of a man.

"Take care, Pedro!" I shouted.

Like a flash he dodged and leaped forward, landing several feet away. Like a flash an arrow sped through the place where he had been. I threw up my rifle and fired straight at the spot where I had seen the movement; but even as my finger pressed the trigger I knew the bullet had missed, for a violent shaking of leaves showed that the man there had thrown himself sidewise. Then, while I was throwing another cartridge into the barrel, the killing of that man was taken out of my hands.

The woman sprang at the bush. In one hand she held Pedro's *machete*, which she had snatched from his belt. With that weapon she hacked and stabbed in a fury that was terrible to see. I caught glimpses of a body writhing under her and heard a snarl, a broken scream and a groan. Then the body lay still and we heard no sound but the slash of the long knife through the leaves as the woman struck and struck and struck.

For a moment Pedro and I were paralyzed. Then Pedro seized her and twisted the dripping machete from her hand. I jumped ashore, and while she stood shaking and sobbing with rage we dragged the body out and looked at it.

"*Por Deus!*" muttered Pedro. "The Spider!"

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YES, *senhores*, it was the Spider. He was a frightful thing to look at, but he was the Spider—the man whom we had thought dead and who now truly was so. Even in death he looked the Spider, for his arms and legs were crumpled up as if something had smashed him. From his belt hung a narrow bag made from a skin, and in it were several arrows. Stepping into the place where his woman had killed him, we found his bow—a short, clumsy but powerful weapon that could drive an arrow clear through a man at close range.

While we were looking at this we heard a dragging sound and stepped out in time to see the last of the Spider. With one hand the woman was hauling him to the river. There she picked him up as if he were only a monkey, swung him and threw him out into the water.

He struck and sank with a soggy splash. A moment later the water began to seethe and boil. We knew the *piranhas*, those ravenous cannibal fish, were swarming upon him and chopping him into fragments. So thick were they that some of them were crowded up into the air, snapping their jaws like traps. A red stain grew on the surface and slowly drifted down the current with that hellish boiling going on under it. Before long, though, the water grew quiet again, and the red stain floated out of sight.

Then the woman looked at Pedro. The hatred faded out of her face, her fierce eyes softened and she took his hand and led us away into the jungle. We traveled for some distance and stopped at length in a place where Pedro looked about and said—

"This is where Antonio disappeared."

We could not see anything strange, though at one spot the tangle of vines and bush was very thick and matted together, as it may be anywhere in those forests. The woman saw we were puzzled and she walked up to that tangle—and suddenly she was gone. But she called, and we followed her. And as we reached the matted vines a part of them moved outward like a door, and there she was, laughing like a little girl playing a game.

Senhores, that was the Spider's nest—a lair made from the growing bushes and vines so cunningly twisted and woven among themselves that a man could stand within ten feet of it and never suspect that it was a shelter and hiding-place. If ever there was a great trap-door spider's nest, that was it.

The man Schwartz had followed the trap-door spider's example inside his den, as well as outside. That spider, as you probably know, not only makes a door which swings shut behind him, and covers that door with things that grow around it, but he also makes a secret pocket at the side of his nest, where he can hide if any enemy discovers his lair. And the Spider had done this also.

At one side of his den the ground rose, and there he had dug a hole and covered it over with the growing things so that nobody would ever know it was there. It was not meant to hide in, though, but to conceal the things he took from murdered men. In that hole, when the woman showed it to us, we found all the property of Custodio, Gumercindo, Saldanha and the brothers Maciel. There was Gumercindo's money, the supplies taken from the others and their weapons and even their clothes. But of the men themselves there was no sign anywhere.

When Pedro asked the woman what had become of the men, she said that after the Spider killed them and stripped them of all they had, he did with them just what she had finally done to him—threw them to the *piranhas*, which quickly destroyed them.

Their canoes, she said, he hid until night, when he took them far up the quiet little creek where we had first seen her, and there, where neither flame nor smoke would be seen by any one, he burned them—all except the light, fast canoe of Custodio, which he concealed very cunningly and used himself. In this he made his spying trips, going at night and staying away for a day or two. No doubt he had been almost beside us more than once, lying low, watching and listening with that spidery patience of his and learning whom he might kill with profit.

In all these murders, the woman said, he used the bow and arrow which was silent and easy enough to handle at close range. In all the killings except that of Antonio Maciel he made her lure the men ashore at some place where he lurked, ready to strike them down. To Custodio, Lucas and Saldanha she had called and showed herself, just as she did to us, and they came to her and so to their death. Gumercindo was caught in another way, for he was a shrewd man and was hastening home and thus was not so likely to tarry for any savage woman. The Spider had had her stay out of sight, though near the water, and scream as if in great danger. Gumercindo, like a brave fellow he was, sped to shore and dashed into the bush to save the one who was in such distress. He was shot in the back for his pains.

Antonio Maciel was killed because he was coming straight at the Spider's nest with his *machete* ready to cut through what he took for a natural tangle. Through a small opening in the side of his den the Spider shot him and dragged him swiftly inside, so that when the other men arrived they found nothing but the last place where he had cut his way. That was some distance back from where he died.

We learned, too, that Pedro and I were to have been the next victims, if we had come near enough. The Spider had a place down-stream where he could watch what went on at headquarters across the river, and he saw Pedro load up the canoe with what looked like many supplies, and so hastened back and made the woman run to that place at the creek and play her part when we passed on our return. While she tried to bring us ashore he lurked ready to kill us, but when we refused to come he was too wise to attack us at a distance, so he let us go.

So Pedro's foolish bait caught something after all, though even he did not suspect that the Spider still lived. He carried that bait to see what might come of it and later he believed that the Death was some Indian.

When we came back and Pedro had given the bird-call of her people, she was alone, for the Spider was away somewhere spying, and she wanted us to come ashore only because she was hungry to talk with the man who could speak her own tongue.

After she left us at the creek she told the Spider, on his return, of our new camp and all our new supplies. He went seeking it, came back angry and beat her. From that time on she told him nothing more of us but met Pedro secretly. She did not know that the Spider had followed her on that last day until Pedro jumped, and the arrow flashed by him. Then her hatred of the Spider, which had long been growing in her, flamed out in the fury that destroyed him.

She had no love for him, but had been sold to him by her people, whom he had met by chance in the jungle before he came back to the river and made his lair. He gave the headman his rifle for her, she said, and, though he had used up all his cartridges so that the gun was useless, the headman made the trade because women were plentiful in his tribe but guns were very scarce, and he might be able to get cartridge.

She told us also that her people knew where there was gold, and that the Spider had planned to get much of this gold in trade for the supplies he took from our men. Thus, in time, he hoped to become very rich, and then, perhaps, would make his way into Peru, where he was not known, and where he could enjoy the wealth gained through the deaths of honest men.

So you see, *senhores*, it was as I told you at the beginning—this man lived like a spider and he died like one. If you know spiders, you know that the female is larger and stronger than the male, and that often she turns on him and destroys him. The thing that destroyed this Spider was the fact that he did not know this big, handsome woman's heart.

Though I do not claim to know much of women, yet I have observed a few and I have noticed that when a man treats a woman as something bought and paid for, the time may come when he had best beware of her. I have noticed, too, that when women meet men for whom they care, it makes little difference whether they are fine ladies from Rio, or humble maidens of the village, or savage women of the jungle—at heart they are all the same.

BIG MEDICINE

By Edgar Young

Author of "The No-Good Guy," "The Streak of Lean," etc.

TOM FLOOD was the windiest man in Gatun. He hadn't hit town but a few days when some one allowed that he "sure was 'big medicine' to hear him tell it." "Alabam" Goodloe, who hailed from Kentucky and talked like a coon, bet a five-dollar gold piece on Flood's "come-out" that night in a crap game down in House 68 on the New Gatun road.

Flood threw the double six, the double ace and the ace deuce the first three shots, which, in the natural consequence of things, cost Alabam thirty-five dollars, for he was doubling his bet each time. He then bet forty and Flood threw the double deuce, little Joe, for a point. The crowd laughed at this mess of "slow craps," for there are more sevens on a pair of bones than there are fours, O my brothers.

Goodloe passed the dice back to Flood with anything but hope written in his face, and, as Flood shook them and pounded them against his head for luck, Alabam, in that pleading tone peculiar to a "nachel bohn" crap-shooter, had called on him as follows:

"Looky hyeah, Big Medicine, you bettah had make that ah-uh joah! Shake, rattle and roll 'em way out!" Sundry other remarks followed in crap-shooter jargon.

The faders shouted with laughter. Some

looked quickly for signs of anger in Flood's face at the nickname Goodloe had called him, for men sometimes do not take kindly to construction-camp appellations, which are usually epithetic in character and have to do with outstanding personal and physical traits. At that time, we had in Gatun a "Step-and-a-half," a "Three Fingers," big and little "Baldy," "Gimpy," "Slim," "Shorty," and many a "Tex" and "Red," with a descriptive adjective preceding, and a "Cowboy Lawyer" from Tucson.

Flood, however, caught the joke and laughed louder than the others, and in a few days every man in camp knew him as Big Medicine. Many people on the Zone never knew what his real name was.

If a name ever fitted a man this name fitted Flood. He was big in every way —six foot three inches of awkwarkness, big hands, big feet, and the double joints on his knees and wrists stuck out like knobs. His face was a brick red and his thin hair and eyebrows were white as cotton, not from old age but from being born that way, for he was nearer thirty-five than forty. His mouth was wide and filled with short, heavy teeth. His eyes were a china blue and stared as frankly as those of a doll's in a "Kentucky Derby" flimflam stand at Coney Island.

He looked outlandish in commissary khakis. Zone fashions for men ran to stiff brimmed Stetsons of the same type worn by the Zone police, and pigskin puttees. Flood retained his big, round-topped, west Texas hat with flopping brim, and a pair of Mexican leggings that snapped on the side with a steel spring and fastened underneath the instep with a buckle and strap; they extended above his knees in the shape of a semicircle. When he carried his jacket on his arm his heavy suspenders caught and held the eye, for men wore belts on the Zone.

And talk? This was the biggest part about him. His voice was loud and his laugh a guffaw. His words boomed up and down the streets and through the flimsy bachelor quarters, which were unceiled buildings with partitions running part way and lattice-work the rest of the way between the rooms. When he was in one of these buildings his laugh could be heard in all the others in that area.

On the four days following the monthly tour of the pay-wagon with its yellow money for white men and white money for yellow and black men, the coin of two realms itched like cooties in men's clothes. Those of the "gold roll" whose inclinations were toward games of chance listened for Big Medicine's laugh and drifted in for a game of poker or to shout incantations to the ivory cubes. And when we were broke, on the other twenty-six days of the month, we looked for a crowd on a porch of one of the quarters and went there to hear Big Medicine shoot the bull.

He had been everywhere. He was born in a covered wagon somewhwere out in the Panhandle, and as far back as he could remember his "old man" and "old lady" had been among the first to put out in the direction of any rumored gold strike, land boom, or other frontier rainbow's end. When finally they had settled on the rockiest and sandiest patch of land in the Mormon Valley of Idaho, he, with his natural heritage of gipsy blood, had set forth to appease his wanderlust in many lands. He had broken horses and roped steers from Alberta to Chihuahua, been a railroad "shack," miner, stage-coach driver, lumberjack, harvest hand, trapper, hunter, Swiss guide, Quaker medicine man, sailor before the mast, tropical prospector and tramp, and explorer in both arctic and antarctic expeditions.

He made his advent on the Zone by walking through from Acaponeta, Mexico, "stepping out," as he expressed it, "after a fashion fast and furious." Those of us who had made the same walk listened with more than casual interest and quizzed him on the landmarks. He knew the little turn, the big banyan tree, the deserted fisherman's hut, the broken adze, the grass village; he could not have bluffed. Other men made shrewd inquiries at the psychological moment, for the Panama Canal Zone was a good place to get caught "out on a limb." Men who worked there had been in every nook and corner of the globe. It was something like the Snug Harbor Home for sailors on Staten Island, where old men between seventy and ninety can tell you the exact telegraph pole and windowpane in that little obscure port you spoke about.

Many of us knew that Flood's yarns were consistent. He embellished the truth, he handled it carelessly, he stretched it out almost to the breaking point, he tossed it up and caught it precariously with one hand behind his back, but he was never trapped in a bare-faced lie. He was a master at enlarging an incident until men held their sides and roared with him, or stood with gaping mouths as he related just when, where and how he had been mixed up in some dramatic occurrence. He laughed heartily at his funny sallies and was the big hero in most of the others.

BIG MEDICINE was some sort of a general foreman down on the rock storage dump back of New Gatun—a settlement of saloons, negro tenements, "silver roll" men with families who did not care to live in the Government labor barracks, and camp followers who did not work for the I. C. C. He had several native straw bosses with gangs of Spaniards and West Indian blacks working for him and three American locomotive crane-runners. The rock trains dumped the stone at the top and the large chunks either rolled down at once or were pried loose and started down by the gangs. At the bottom they were picked up and reloaded into skips, placed on cars and taken to the locks and dumped in with the concrete. Orange-peel buckets or chains were used by the craneman.

Each day's work and the trip down and back through New Gatun supplied Flood with material for hours of yarn spinning on the piazza in the cool of the evening—or at least when the evening should have been cool but usually wasn't. He had heard a negro wench talking to a sanitary inspector in *patois* English; seen two naked kids fighting; one of the crane-runners had refused a bottle of beer from the water cooler in Flood's office, and he had phoned for the ambulance; a Bajan had delivered a sermon to a group of others behind the tool house; he had sent three Castilians for a box of dynamite and had had to go after them; a Gallego had made a funny remark in ungrammatical Spanish—anything. It was all grist for his story-telling proclivity.

He had little education, reading and writing with difficulty, but he had a flow of picturesque language that was at once gripping and startling. He brought to the Zone expressions that remained for months after he had gone, such as: "Shoot where he's standing without giving him time to jump up;" "claw him from his forehead to his umbilicus;" "tear him up as if the hogs had chawed him;" "pull his eyeball out a foot and flop it back into place and scare him;" "re-Jake and back at you again with my stack of yallers," "just barely," and the like.

And these, dead as they look in cold print, were replete with meaning in the mouth of this big, red faced, white eye-browed man. He could mimic a Swede, any type of lime-juicer from a remittance man to a Liverpool Gorblimme-Bill, a Western judge, any type of Spaniard, and almost any other kind of man he had laid eyes on. North "Caroleenians" he dubbed "down-homers," explaining that they all went to Virginia and spent the rest of their lives talking about "down home." East Texans were "boll-weevils" and "rawzum-bellies" and they raised "lean do-gie" cattle, whatever kind of cattle that is.

Life was one big joke shot through with dramatic incidents, down on the porch of House 68. No man went inside and went to bed until Flood did—it wasn't any use. That's how windy he was. Men sometimes passed the wink when he was spinning his fighting yarns, and a good one hundred per cent. said to each other behind his back that they did not think he would harm a fly; that he just liked to talk, and no one had ever seen him sore for so much as a second. It was out of reason that a man as good-natured as he was should ever have had trouble with any man.

And then a man moved into House 68 who did not seem to take kindly to him. He also had drifted in over the trail from somewhwere or other, he didn't say just where, and had been running a stiff-leg derrick down at Mindi and had been transferred to one of the cranes on Flood's rock storage dump. He and Flood had showed up walking together the first evening he appeared at House 68 and that night he had been one of the circle gathered around Big Medicine. After that they did not show up together, and when the group gathered, this newcomer sat far at the other end by himself. We took it for granted that Flood had given him a call on the job and that he was peeved about it.

He was as big a man as Flood, but of a different type. He was tall and rangy, swarthy of complexion, with a small, waxy, black mustache, quiet as a grave, dangerous as a machine-gun, boasting of his prowess as a fighter by his silence more than Flood did by his words. He passed no wink but he often turned and listened gravely with a half sneer on his lips when Flood made some particularly bald assertion in regard to some fight or other, and it seemed that fighting had become the theme of the majority of Big Medicine's tales with himself the fighting son of a gun from way back.

Those who saw he doubted Flood's stories had little use for him. They, themselves, looked on them as things to be taken with a sprinkling of bichloride of sodium in spots; but he was a good entertainer. He was a sort of vaudeville performer, and no one expected the exact truth to the letter. No man ever went to a picture show in the Y. M. C. A. while Flood lived in House 68.

Flood wasn't afraid of this newcomer's opinion, or didn't appear to be. He would tell some outlandish story of fighting and gun-play where he was the big It and then he would rear back in his chair and peer through the bunch to see how the craneman took it. He told us in a loud aside that the stranger was "Nig" Barberly, an ex-tinhorn from Salina Cruz, and that he was "pizen and meaner'n a kyotie."

Further, he said little in answer to whispered queries other than that they had never been good friends and had had words on the job over the work, and that some day he reckoned he would empty a gun into Nig's carcass so fast it would "cut him right off at the top of the pockets."

Barberly heard this and walked into his room, soon to return with a bristling cartridge-belt buckled around him. Every man in the crowd noticed this, but Flood was in the midst of a yarn that required all his attention when Barberly reappeared.

From this time on we noticed that the ill feeling seemed to grow more pronounced on both sides, Flood raising his voice many times for Barberly's particular benefit, Barberly growing more silent and sneering in his solitary chair at the other end of the porch.

These porches, by the way, were four rooms long and were heavily screened with bronze mosquito-wire. The screen door was just opposite the door to the house in the center—information little required by men who know Gatun and the road that wound around the top of the hill to New Gatun. As a rule Flood's end of the piazza was crowded with men who either lived in House 68, or neighboring quarters, or paused on their pilgrimage to New Gatun and remained to get an ear-full.

ONE evening after supper we foregathered as usual. It was during the dry season and the red sun hung poised a few feet over the Caribbean down beyond Colon, for the sun sets in the Atlantic from the C. Z. It was hot and some men lolled in pajamas and some in gaudy silk kimonos they had won in Chinese raffles. Flood had pulled his leggings and shoes off and sat in his shirt sleeves with his heavy braces thrown down from his shoulders.

Hotter than the setting sun were his yarns of battles on blackbirders down in the South Seas when he was the bosom pal of old Cap. Durfee. Blood flowed, snarling lipped men sprang upon each other and beat and mauled and slashed to a fare-ye-well. Desert sands glowed white under the boiling sun, and along trails dotted with human skulls daring men ventured, with Flood usually in the lead; bands of swashbuckling revolutionists attacked and smashed the enemy, fighting valiantly and sapping their way through intervening buildings.

Through mad stampedes in the far North we surged, flogging the lagging huskies with the singing whips. Sheath knives gleamed greasily in the murky light cast by swinging forecastle lamps as with a table leg we met the onrush of pockmarked Portuguese sailors. We shivered and munched gum drops and ate dried pemmican at the two poles of the earth. The ice groaned and upheaved beneath us, and outside our *igloos* of snow the wolf dogs howled mournfully.

Flood painted with a lavish brush. But colder than the arctic or antarctic wastes sat Nig Barberly at the other end of the porch, swarthy faced, silent and sneering.

At the conclusion of one of Flood's narratives he took his feet down from the railing, cleared his throat, spat through the screening and turned his chair half around in our direction. He expelled the air from his lungs in a contemptuous grunt.

Flood reared up and looked across at him for a few seconds like an angry lion. Then he began telling about beating up a certain individual in Salina Cruz. He took great pains on the personal description of this individual, painting him as a tall, lanky man, black-mustached, silent to surliness, underhanded, mean, low-down, and very dangerous in the cunning way of a snake in dog days. His description fitted Barberly so well that most of us were dividing our attention between the story and watching how Nig would take it.

Flood elaborated. He had just ended a sentence about said party in question being so "honery" that he would "beat up his own granny" and "take up sprouted corn" when we noticed Barberly's face contort into lines of horrible ferocity. His white teeth gleamed through his snarling lips. A volley of oaths roared from his lungs as he cursed Flood for every liar and so-and-so imaginable.

Big Medicine sprang three feet in the air and went for him all spraddled out, whooping like an Indian. Barberly whipped out two .45 Colts and began shooting from both hips.

Alabam Goodloe always denied being the first to jump through the screen, for it was torn off the entire end of the porch by the swarming crowd. Some ran up the road toward the eating-house and some ran down the road toward New Gatun and some ran around and watched proceedings, their morbid curiosity to see bloodshed and slaughter getting the better of their judgment.

I was one of these latter and when I got out in the road Flood was writhing on the floor in horrible fashion and groaning like a stricken bull. He struggled to his knees and from the recesses of his shirt and pants drew forth a sawed-off shotgun with the stock whittled into a pistol handle—the most ghastly shooting-iron that any man ever laid eyes on. When both barrels went off it sounded like the premature blast in Culebra Cut the time Teddy was down.

I was nearing the hospital on the hill between there and New Gatun when I heard five feeble little shots like a pop-gun from back in that direction, but I didn't turn to look back. I was on my way for the ambulance and in my heartfelt desire to get help as soon as possible had forgotten that there was a phone in the hook and ladder house a few doors above House 68. Had I remembered, it is doubtful whether I would have tried to use the phone, for the girls were very popular and connections hard to get after the men had left off work on the job.

A FEW evenings later, when Flood narrated the incident to an unusually large bunch on the porch, he gave what I hadn't seen as follows:

"Me and Nig both fell sprawlin' and the few that hadn't yet joined the bird gang showed signs of speed and tore up the ground getting away. Them big poky dot suits bellied out behind and them red shimmies stuck back like table tops. I hyeard women screaming as they passed them four-family houses above the eatin' house. I peers down the road and they's a motley crew of them hittin' the high spots in that direction with Sandy working in the lead in a suit of B. V. D.'s turning sideways to keep from flyin'. I look straight down, below and see Slim and "Banjer-Pickin" Charley tearin' through the swag for the Z. P. station, buckjumpin' the high weeds and ditches.

"This has all took place in a second and a quarter and we're yet holdin' our mouths with our hands to keep from squallin' and laughin'; and we're faunching and wringing and twisting all over the floor and makin' funny noises in our throats at the joke we've sprung when Nig and I both glances up and sees something that puts that supper we've ate right against our epiglotis.

"They's an arm poked out the winder, weavin' back and forth, and death, hell, and the grave pintin' in our general direction in the shape of a New York bull-dog pistol with the barrel an inch and a sixteenth long and the caliber of Ped'Migel tunnel. Whoever he is ain't lookin' out but squattin' on his hunkers on the inside and aimin' to shoot be-guess and be-god. I reckon he knows his weapon, for them bull-dogs spit and shave lead and kick and are dangerous at all points of the compass when they go off.

"As the hammer begins to raise, me and Nig puts for the screen door on our all fours, like a couple of bears before a Kansas cyclone. Nig swears he straddled me and rode me out the door. I remember distinctly that I thought he was that little Six-Bits I rode for Lew Warren in Prickly Pear Valley out near East Helena and I skinned both heels spurring Nig's cartridge-belt. He buckjumped from the door to the ground and I reached for leather but there warn't none and he throwed me. First time I was ever throwed by man or beast, and I've forked Catalo in my time and rode steers in town fairs. We dove under the house side by side.

"That old bull-pup says *bowie* up above and they's a chunk of lead as big and flat as a dollar digs a gopher hole between our heads, and they's an aftermath of shavings and sawdust pours down on us. Nig rolls one way and me t'other and we hear three more shoots shot and the balls a-tearin' out through the ceiling and the tin roof, and we know the old short nose is performing true to form.

"At the fourth shot, whoever had the gun has throwed it from him, and it bounces out the door into the road. Nig claims he seen the hammer strike a rock, but from where I lay the gun appeared to twirl around and take due and deliberate aim at the upper left-hand corner of my shirt pocket. I seen the hammer raise, heard her click, and see her go off. She jumped three feet and a quarter in the air, and a Trinidad nigger in my gang says it knocked the bean pot square out of his female's hand, just this side of the reservoir.

"By the time we gets seated on the steps and I've taken out a deck of kyards, and begin dealin' us a friendly hand of seven up, all of Gatun, New Gatun, half of Mindi, and a quarter of Mount Hope is foggin' in our direction. I reckon it's a good thing that, although I'm a man of few words, I can hand out a good single-handed line of talk when I'm forced to.

"I staved off the ambulance men who was for takin' us to the hospital, the Z. P. who wanted to jug us, the sanitary inspector who wanted to lick us for tearin' the screenin', the colonel and the major who wanted to fire us, and our fellow house-mates who wanted to kill us. It took seven quarts of Sunnybrook before we declared peace among ourselves and with the world in general at midnight."

Although I heard Big Medicine tell the yarn a dozen times, adding various new lights to it on each repetition, I never heard him mention how we found "Sinbad the Sailor," a little hunchbacked New York Jew named Sindeband, at a late hour wedged in behind a clothes closet shivering and crying with fright, thinking he'd shot Nig Barberly in defending Flood from him. Sinbad thought the world of Big Medicine and many's the tale Flood afterward spun for his particular benefit.

Finally Big Medicine sprung the big surprize when Jumbo, the blacksmith, got on a rampage and climbed his frame down in front of the eating-house. Men who saw it claimed there never was such another fight south of the Rio Grande River, for they fought for an hour. Flood licked big Jumbo to a standstill, and the two of them went down into New Gatun to have a drink together. There's exceptions to all rules and we had to acknowledge that Big Medicine was one of them.

NIGHT ON THE DESERT

BY W. H. GARDNER

An acrid hint of ozone, and far-flung
The cold pure vault of heaven hung
With incandescent worlds.

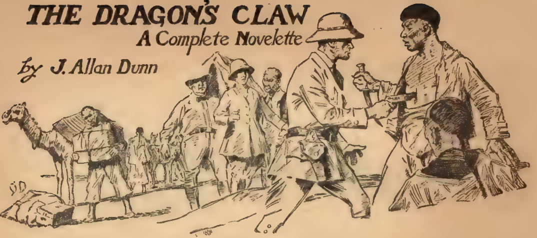
A light keen breath of new-born breeze.
'Twixt purple sky and purple plain a frieze
Of bordering buttes.

At foot, white sand all luminous—a dearth
Of sound or life—a moon-like earth,
An inorganic world.

THE DRAGON'S CLAW

A Complete Novelette

by J. Allan Dunn



Author of "Death's Carpenter," "The Pearls of Paruki," etc.

CHAPTER I

THROATS IN PERIL

THE puzzling, intermittent flashes came again, distinctly, as Neill McNeill, with his back to the sun that was just lifting above the horizon that rimmed the golden-brown desert, gazed with a troubled forehead at the spot where the phenomenon had appeared. He did not like it, he told himself, even while he strove to find some natural explanation for the dazzling streaks that came, irregularly enough, yet with a precision that hinted at some systematic method of production, flickering like miniature lightning from the low western hills whence their little caravan had recently emerged.

It might be caused, he thought, by the level rays of the rising sun shot back from the shoulder of a ledge heavily flaked with mica, shifting from the various facets with the changing angle of the golden beams, but he had not noticed any indications of mica in those sandstone hills and he was apt to notice such things. It was his business as a professional traveler and adventurer to do so.

Another series of the flashes started and flickered out, and McNeill shook his head slightly.

"I'm hanged if I like it," he said just above his breath. "Looks as if some one were signaling in Morse, though if it were Morse I could read it; it may be a Chinese code at that. If so, who are they talking to? There's something fishy about this hurried return trip. The old boy was in too much of a hurry to get back to Peking and—I wonder!"

His gaze wandered over the sleeping camp. Two mangy camels, sulky even in their sleep, lay with their heads stretched out on snaky necks. A dozen pack and saddle horses, dwarfed and shaggy, stood dejectedly about at the end of their pickets.

By the side of his own dog-tent was the humped canvas where Howard Remsden snored on one side of a primitive screen while, on the other, his stepdaughter, Helen, slumbered far more gracefully and easily. Spoked out around the ashes of last night's fire sprawled half a dozen Mongols. As McNeill looked keenly at these, counting them, first one and then another writhed and twisted in the sleep that was already beginning to be disturbed by the sun. There had been a long *trek* the night before, and man and beast had been exhausted before the dry camp had been pitched.

Suddenly McNeill gave vent to a short exclamation and swiftly, silently passed over the sand, soft and fine as ashes, closer to the fire and the sprawling Mongols. His lips parted in a smile as he peered closely at the nearest figure—lifeless, a huddle of clothes and dirty sheepskin.

"Neat trick that," he told himself. "Slipped out of his duds. Now then——"

His practised eyes easily picked up the trail of sandal-prints that led from the group, over low waves of sand that so blended in the strong, level light as to give a false suggestion of flatness.

His hand dropped to an automatic, holstered at his right hip, as he swiftly crouched to a kneeling position, one hand supporting him, the other on the grip of his gun, while he stretched his neck and looked over the crest of a shady billow.

His dark blue eyes matched the hue of the steel of the pistol, gleaming through narrowed lids at the almost naked figure that squatted on the farther slope facing the spot where the flashes had shown in the hills. A brown, long-fingered hand clutched a disc of polished silver tilted so as to catch the sun-rays flaring off at premeditated intervals, a long or short glare of intense light as the curving hand rocked back and forth on the supple, sinewy wrist.

One flash caught McNeill fairly in the eyes and made them water. He noiselessly shifted his angle and then inched back, rose upright, strode past the Mongols and dived into his dog-tent from which he almost immediately emerged and started to shout at the sleeping men in their own dialect, with a vigor that soon brought some semblance of concerted action from them. A fire was started and preparations made for the morning meal.

The man who had been manipulating the silver mirror appeared, yawning as he came over the low dunes. He was of the northern clans, a giant in stature, as tall as McNeill, even broader-shouldered and with arms that swung his hands close to the knee-caps. A long knife, unsheathed, flashed red on his thigh. He hailed McNeill with a morning greeting, and the latter responded with jaws that shut grimly after the salutation.

"It's the first time I ever saw them mirror-talk in China," Neill was thinking, "but there's no reason why they shouldn't. Lots of things I haven't seen and never will. And those priests——?

"We'll start in fifteen minutes, Ling," he said to the tall headman. "We'll drink tea and eat after we get on the march."

Ling's mask of old ivory did not change, but his voice was gently deprecatory.

"The master and his daughter are not yet arisen!" he said. "The beasts are tired."

"That is my affair!" snapped McNeill. "I am your master in this business and you have your orders. See that you obey!"

He could sense that the rest of the Mongols had suddenly stiffened in their attitudes, temporarily frozen, keen to some tenseness in the situation and the whip-like crack of McNeill's voice. From Ling's agate eyes showed a momentary gleam that might have been the light of any of a dozen emotions, none of them friendly. The gleam died before the steady light in the coldly blue orbs of McNeill. Ling turned away with the ghost of a shifting grin on his yellow face. To his shrill syllables two of the men shuffled off toward the camels and three others after the horses.

A flap in the humpback tent of native design was thrown back, and a girl came out, slim in her brown holland riding togs, putteed, helmeted with a pith *topee*, her skin slightly tanned, her eyes even bluer than McNeill's and her hair yellow as ripe corn. She was barely up to McNeill's shoulder, but there was no suggestion of delicacy about her slender figure or the free vigor with which she walked towards him.

"I suppose there is no water to spare for anything but tea," she said. "Not for myself, though I am gritty and grimy to the last degree, but father is fussing about shaving."

McNeill ran his fingers over the stiff red stubble of his own lean jaws and grinned.

"Not a chance of it before nightfall," he answered. "I wish you'd ask him to hurry. We've got to be moving. Have to eat in the saddle this morning."

She looked at him inquiringly but turned and went back to the tent while McNeill gazed after her admiringly. Then he wheeled. Ling had come up behind him noiselessly.

"Well?" asked McNeill.

"One of the camels is very sick—too sick to travel."

"Slit its throat and leave all its load. We can get along without tents for the next three nights."

Ling looked at him evilly.

"Four of the horses are badly galled," he said. "Three more are sick. We have come too far, too fast. We must rest."

"You know we are short of water," said McNeill. "Why do you disobey my orders?"

"It is not possible to obey them, O, my overlord," answered Ling, his face deferential, eyelids down, his soft voice impudent.

Back of him the Mongols had gathered in

a half-ring, looking covertly out of almond eyes that glittered like those of snakes.

McNeill's left arm shot out, caught the waist-cloth of Ling and drew the giant toward him. Ling's right hand shot down to the haft of his knife, but, swifter still, McNeill had drawn his automatic and jabbed its blunt muzzle hard into the stomach of the Mongol.

"You dog," he said, "drop that knife! Drop it or——"

Ling's unwrinkled lids were wide now. In his stare came the red light that shoots from the black opal and tells of hate and murder. But the knife dropped to the sand and McNeill put his foot upon it. Then he swiftly searched Ling for more weapons, found another knife and a cheap revolver with three cartridges in the cylinder. The shells he tossed far away with a jerk, flinging the pistol after them.

"Miss Remsden!" he called.

The girl came running out of the tent. Behind her followed a stout man with a fussy, important face that was scorched rather than tanned, whose clothes fitted him badly and became him worse; a bow-legged, bow-stomached person who most evidently essayed to be a personage and who strutted like a gosling. His pale gray eyes were inclined to pop and now they strained at the action going forward.

"What's this McNeill, what's this?" he demanded in a pompous voice. McNeill paid no attention to him, speaking to the girl.

"My rifle—in my tent! And then get yours!"

She got the first and sped back for the second. McNeill stepped back from Ling who had stood immovable since the dropping of the knife. The muzzle of the rifle swung in an arc of command about the semicircle of Mongols.

"First to move, moves once only," warned McNeill. "Now then, Mr. Remsden, please go over them carefully and remove all their weapons. Miss Helen will help you cover them one by one as you go about it."

Remsden's red face had gone patchy and his hands shook but the nervousness of the man was evidently purely physical. He was not a coward and he nerved himself up to his task, backed by the girl. At McNeill's directions he tossed the miscellaneous assortment of weapons into a heap. The latter ordered Ling to make them into a bundle, using a sheepskin and tying the package firmly with strips of leather.

"I'll carry this," said McNeill, "till we come to the first hole, dirt or water. Now then break camp, leave the tents and heavy baggage. Saddle up! Jump!"

THEY jumped and McNeill, rifle at carry, walked to his own tent and picked up his field-glasses as the Mongols, spurred into feverish activity, stripped down the canvas. McNeill focussed his lenses and looked anxiously toward the western hills. After a little hesitation Remsden came over to him.

"What have you found out, Neill?" he asked. "What was it? A mutiny?"

McNeill turned on him.

"I'll answer you that question," he said, "when you tell me what you were up to at the temple. I suspected something when you wanted to come away in such a tearing hurry."

Remsden blinked at him from between his sandy eyelashes.

"Why there was nothing to stay for any longer," he said. "We had seen the ritual. I had got all I wanted."

"I don't doubt it," said McNeill. "The point is, what did you get?"

Remsden blustered.

"I employed you as guide and interpreter, Mr. McNeill, not to poke into my private affairs."

"As things have turned out they are my private affairs," said McNeill coldly, "if my life is my private affair, which I think it is. To say nothing of your stepdaughter's life, I don't know just how highly you value your own."

He broke off to hasten the final preparations for departure. The girl was already mounted. Remsden got patchy again and then his face flamed angrily.

"You have given me no explanation," he barked. "I repeat that whatever I do on this trip for which I hired you, has nothing to do with the contract. What has happened?"

"I caught Ling heliographing to a party in the hills," said McNeill briefly. "I think he was answering orders to delay us. I took up a collection of their cutlery to prevent a throat-cutting. I don't know yet whether I have succeeded. Look at that dust cloud there where the sun catches it. That's a party after us and they will come swiftly. I'll bet a thousand dollars they are priests of the Hoang Lung."

He caught the shifting of Remsden's eyes and nodded.

"I thought so," he added. "I don't know what you've been up to, but it's three days to Peking, seventy-two hours, and just about a seventy-two to one shot that we don't get there. Better get on your horse, Mr. Remsden. Ling, that's the pass you talked about last night, isn't it? How far is it?"

He pointed to two dark purple juts low on the eastern rim of the plain. Ling's eyes glinted.

"Twelve hours," he said. "If the horses and camels hold out."

"They'll have to. But we won't go that way Ling. We'll strike south until we strike the Chang-Li River. We'll keep in the gullies out of sight. I'm going to ride in the rear, Ling, and if I think, or if I should just happen to think, that you are trying to signal back any change of our plans, I'll shoot the lot of you. I'll defile your bodies and leave them to the vultures. I'll cut off your queues and burn them to ashes. Get my meaning? You do? Then start!"

Ling snarled like a trapped wolf, openly, forgetting to mask his feelings. McNeill grinned back at him. The girl rode over to the latter's side and he changed the grin to a smile as he surveyed her fearless eyes and her trim seat on the pony.

"We are in some danger, Mr. McNeill?" she asked. He looked at her and frankly nodded.

"And then some," he added, a bit grimly. "Thank God I'm not afraid to tell you. But we are going to get out of it all right."

"I'm sure of that," she replied quietly and rode ahead to join her stepfather.

McNeill's smile came back as he surveyed her. As the little caravan descended into a shallow ravine with rocks protruding here and there through the sand like dry bones, he began to whistle softly. A scrap was forward, and McNeill loved a fight. It was only when he thought of the girl that the muscles in his jaws tightened and the whistle was interrupted.

Back in the western hills the dust cloud moved swiftly down and out into the plain, steel points and blades twinkling here and there as the sun pierced the veil of floating soil.

CHAPTER II

IN THE CAÑON

DOWN in the blackness of the ravine the thin thread that still persisted in the watercourse tinkled over the flinty stones. The walls of the cañon lifted clear and sheer five hundred feet, dark blots of purple. The narrow strip of sky above them, as seen from the floor of this valley, suddenly appearing in the sandy desert as if the granite precipices had thrust themselves up through the yielding soil, was studded with stars. There was no sound but the sharp voice of the waters emerging from the sands to lose themselves again where the ravine ended.

A perilous ledge led along the western cliff and passed the black gorge of a cave that slanted sharply upwards after a brief passage that ran back level for perhaps a hundred feet. At the mouth of the cave, rifle across his knee, sat Neill McNeill, craving for the smoke he might not permit himself.

Forty-eight hours had passed since they left the camp where he had caught Ling heliographing, and all his senses warned him that danger was very close at hand. He knew it from the attitude of Ling and his followers. Their surliness was lightened; they had seen, had heard, or smelled something that his over-civilized perceptions had missed. He knew the priests must have been misled at first but they were indubitably far better mounted than the Remsden party, and not all McNeill's skill had been able to obliterate trails.

Both nights he had bound the Mongols hand and foot. By day he herded them. They were utterly one with the pursuit; they were eating up the scant supply of food and at times tried to delay the march, until McNeill threatened to shoot the first recalcitrant, but, if he left them free, it would but be to augment and advise the enemy, and he had a plan in mind by which he could still use them, despite their wishes.

Both the camels he had killed as too slow, taking valuable time to bury them deep so that the clustering carrion birds should not act as guides. Only two of the horses were in any shape to travel. Remsden had ruined two already with his weight and clumsy riding. The detour had delayed them, and they were still thirty hours from the outskirts of Peking. And, until they reached the foreign quarter of that city, they could not reckon themselves safe.

"Possibly not then," meditated McNeill, watching the opposite sky-line.

There was no trail on the face of the other cliff, so he covered the ledge on their own side and was on guard against surprize. At the end of the straight tunnel Remsden and Helen lay resting, if not asleep. Ling and the rest were tucked in a niche, none too comfortably, and McNeill himself had tied the soaked hide-strips that fettered them.

"I wonder," he went on in thought, "just what the old boy did back there at the temple. He was hobnobbing with that sleek rat, Fung-Ti, who got beaten out for high-priest at the last Hoang Lung election. Remsden's got his own ambitions. He'd rather be head of the Museum of Philological Research than anything in this world, or the next for that matter. He'd barter all he has for that, his stepdaughter included. When it comes down to his own ends he's a devil of selfishness. A-ha!"

He cuddled up his rifle lightly, leaning forward from the ledge. There was more than a hint of moonrise across the ravine, and his ears had caught the *clink* of metal—not hoof on stone, since few horses were shod in that region, but blade or point against stirrup.

Then, silhouetted against the radiance of the eastern sky, back so far from the edge that only the upper parts of their bodies showed, there came a file of horsemen. The riders wore queer, pointed caps and flowing robes. He could see spears and guns aslant their shoulders. They rode fast, and he counted over fifty.

There was a slight shuffle beside him. Ling, bound as he was, had wriggled his way to the front of the cave. His clothes had caught on something, and the force he had summoned to break free had betrayed him, even as he raised his face and opened his mouth to shout to the dark riders across the cañon.

With a sidelong sweep McNeill brought the butt of his gun down on the base of the Mongol's skull, and the cry died in his throat. But it was a close call, and McNeill patrolled the cave to the niche where he inspected his prisoners and gagged them with dirty strips from their own clothes, threatening them with a knife if they made the tiniest sound. Then he went back to where he had left Ling.

The ledge was empty.

"Came to and rolled himself over," McNeill decided. "Now I wonder just why."

The answer came to him almost immediately. The riders were coming back again, and McNeill could see two of them dismount and peer down into the black gulf, evidently suspicious of the sound they had heard—the slump of Ling into the cañon. He could have picked them off easily, but to remain hidden was of paramount importance. They had but a small supply of water. Besieged in the cave, they must soon give in.

No other sound came from the fallen Ling who had sacrificed himself in vain to serve the fierce priests of Hoang Lung. The smashing drop of a quarter of a thousand feet had beaten the life out of him.

"They'll stay till morning," McNeill told himself, "and then they'll find him, unless——"

He went back to the end of the tunnel where the natural rift narrowed and went up in a narrow, irregular ramp. Under this McNeill paused. Once he wetted his finger and held it up in the darkness. He thought he could detect a faint stirring of the air. From the pocket of the coat he wore, for the night air was chill, he fished out an electric torch and slipped the switch. The beam fell on the sleeping face of Helen Remsden, as she was styled, having adopted the name of her stepparent. McNeill's jaw hardened as he gazed at the beauty that even the cruel forcing of the last two days' flight could not eradicate. From an angle to the right where the tunnel side-pocketed came the faint stamping of horses and the reek of their bodies. Then he shifted the ray to Remsden's puffy countenance and, stooping, shook him by the shoulder.

"Eh, what?"

"Ssh!" cautioned McNeill. "Come with me to the cave mouth. I want a talk with you."

His tone was imperative and Remsden yielded to it without further grumbling. By this time the moon had topped the further wall and was whitening the ledge outside. By and by its light would steal down into the depths and, perhaps, reveal the body of Ling, sure sign that the white men were beleaguered near by.

McNeill thought of climbing down and either bringing back the body or hiding it beneath loose stones. But, in such darkness, he could not hope to eradicate all marks of the fall from the sharp eyes that would surely be seeking for them as soon as light permitted. There would be spatters of blood and, in the meantime, there were other things to do—hopes to work on. Remsden was one of these latter.

McNEILL tackled his employer without formality.

"Remsden, we are in —— bad shape. They've got us cornered. The Hoang Lung crowd has just filed along the cliff across the way. They are suspicious of this place and they'll hang around till morning. There are only two horses fit to travel."

"How do you know they are the Hoang Lung crowd? They may be just a band of robbers with whom Ling was in league."

"I'll bet you know it is the Hoang Lung outfit better than I do, Remsden. In point of fact, it doesn't matter who they are, so long as they are hostile. If they get us—well what they do to us two men don't count so much. I'll take good care they don't get Miss Helen alive, but they are nasty devils and their sort of vengeance don't stop at death. Now I am pretty certain you've got us in this scrape—something you've done at the temple. If it was sacrilege we can't help it now. If you've stolen something, you and that sleek rat of a Fung-Ti, perhaps they'll make terms with us if you give it up. And it's up to you to do it."

Remsden's beefy face was rigid with obstinacy.

"I've done nothing that can be undone," he said.

McNeill, keeping the ray shaded from without, suddenly threw the light on Remsden's face and surveyed him keenly. The pop-eyes showed only a sullen doggedness.

"It was all right for you to risk your own life for whatever you were after," went on McNeill, "but, though you told me and told your stepdaughter you only wanted to witness the ritual, I don't believe you. But now you are risking her life and mine for that matter. You've fooled both of us. It's two lives against yours and both of them younger ones. Ling somehow slid off this cliff a little while ago," he went on moodily. "You might do the same thing."

"You mean you would kill me?"

"If I were sure you had something on you that would save the girl's life by giving it up, I would, without compunction."

Remsden gulped.

"You can search me if you like, McNeill. I've got nothing on me. You can search my baggage, destroy it if you like. You'll find nothing. I wanted to see the ritual. I may have offended them, but you're on the wrong track. There must be some way out of this. It isn't just a question of money, McNeill. I told you I'd give you a bonus if the trip was satisfactory. I'll double that. I'll triple it if you get me safe into Peking. That was in the contract—to guard as well as guide. Get me safe into Peking, McNeill, and I'll give you a thousand dollars. I'll give you five."

"I wouldn't accept five cents for trying to save your skin," said McNeill. "I'll do the best I can for you as per contract. Now you get back to the end of the cave. I'll need you presently."

"You think we can get away?" asked Remsden persistently.

"I said for you to get inside," said McNeill so grimly that the stout man crept obediently away.

Presently McNeill followed him. The girl was still sleeping. He switched his ray into the rift above his head and clambered up the slanting way. It was some four feet wide and the sides were damp with moisture. It narrowed, but he wormed his way on and then backed down again.

"It goes through," he said to himself. "And it's all soft earth, I'm fairly certain—just a landslide. There's a chance—for her. And, by the Eternal, we'll open it up if I work those Chinks' fingers to slivers of bone.

He kicked up the drowsy Mongols, prodding them with a knife in one hand, threatening them with his pistol in the other, explaining to them what he wanted.

Soon they were at work with stirrup-irons, with pots and metal cups, with jagged cans, one above the other in a living ladder, digging at the soft soil, passing it down in improvised sacks and panniers from the pack animals, working desperately under McNeill's supervision. They labored in the dark, save for occasional spurts of the torch, but they made good progress. Remsden watched without speaking to McNeill who had no time to spare for him, and then the girl awoke and came feeling through the dusk of the cave to see what was happening. McNeill spared a minute or so to tell her.

"They'll locate us by morning," he said. "But they won't find us. I was sure I noted a current of air passing down this shaft that has filled up in some landslide during winter rains. It is not at all probable they know of its existence. Once we break through we can get the ponies up there and make a clean getaway while they are trying to rush the ledge or fooling about in the bottom of the ravine. We can hold them off from the cave-front indefinitely."

"As long as we have water," she corrected.

"There's moisture enough in that shaft to keep us going for a while," answered McNeill. "But I'll make shift to show them our Chinese friends we have with us and, as long as they think they have us trapped, they'll go leisurely about it. In the meantime you and Mr. Remsden will be streaking for Peking."

"And you, what are you going to do?"

"Me? I'm going to amuse myself giving a lesson in marksmanship to the Hoang Lung crowd until I've made them very shy of doing anything else but try and starve us out. You see they won't figure we have a back door and not use it. Then, when I've got them cautious, I'll come scooting hotfoot after you two. There's the Piu-kiang River ten miles east-by-north, and there are little villages here and there. You must buy a boat or steal one and take to the stream. Steal one if you can, it'll leave less trace."

"You keep on saying 'you,'" she said. "You get a boat. We shall wait for you."

"No you won't," McNeill answered. "I may have to strike quite another trail. Once out, we must scatter and join as best we can. You stick by your stepfather. I'll show up."

She was silent for a minute. Then she objected—

"There are only two horses that can travel."

"Three," lied McNeill. "The yellow pony is feeling fine again."

"Are you telling me the truth?" she asked.

"Ask Mr. Remsden," said McNeill.

"Father!" she appealed.

"Yes, my dear, Mr. McNeill knows what is best. There are three horses. We must rely upon his judgment. Those coolies are slacking up I think."

McNeill went after the Mongols, and the girl subsided. He did not dare to leave the workmen though he dreaded letting the body of Ling remain in plain sight in the ravine. Not that it much mattered, he thought, if they got through the tunnel all right. His own chance of getting away on the yellow pony was pretty slim, but his duty, as he saw it, was to see to the best chances of the girl and of the man who had indubitably employed him as guard as well as guide.

The current of air was steadily stronger. Now and then he climbed up among the men, blinding them with his light, ignoring the murder in their faces, making them turn their backs while he inspected, whipping them with his will and the fear of death lest they strangle him in a sudden rush. It would not do to let them get too close to the ultimate opening. That he must clear himself, or they would give the alarm.

And, after hours of incredible toil, the thing was done. It was close to dawn and the moon had gone, with the stars paling, when McNeill broke through to the open and found a fortunate masking of bushes and scrub trees all about the hole. Once again he herded the bound Mongols to their niche and then, with Remsden struggling with blistering hands to help him, the two white men enlarged the mouth of the shaft until it was wide enough to allow the egress of the dwarf ponies. All this time the girl stood on watch where the horizontal tunnel opened on the ledge, above the crushed body of Ling, while the mists began to wisp out of the ravine and the sunrise was imminent.

McNEILL got the two horses up the incline and saddled them, while Remsden gathered such provisions as they would need. Then McNeill fetched the girl.

He pointed out to them the lay of the land that sloped toward the little river that, in its turn, would bring them out on the water-highway to Peking. He gave them brief instructions as to their course, handing them the maps and two rifles with ammunition. Remsden could use enough Chinese dialect to make his offers of money understood and, as long as they kept ahead of the fanatic priests and their influence, McNeill had little doubt that they could buy their safety to Peking. At the last moment, when McNeill had crawled off to the cliff edge on a reconnoitering expedition, the girl rebelled.

"We shall not go without McNeill," she declared. "At least I shall not. He is deliberately sacrificing himself for us."

"You are talking foolishly, my dear," answered Remsden nervously. "McNeill is not a fool. He is not throwing away his own life. I have promised to reward him munificiently when we are safe in Peking, and——"

The girl looked at him scornfully.

"You think everything can be bought with gold," she said.

"Well," answered her stepfather with smug complacence, "there are few things that can not. By the way, you may give me back the wallet. It will be safe with me now. I was afraid of light fingers while the Chinese were with us. I sleep so much sounder than you."

Contempt still in her eyes, the girl took a leather wallet from her bosom and gave it to Remsden. The latter furtively fingered its bulk and slid it out of sight before McNeill came back through the brush.

"They are down in the ravine," he said. "They have found the body of Ling. Soon they will be coming along the ledge. I shall use our prisoners as a barrier until you have got well away. Then I shall come after you, but do not wait for me. I am sure you will get through all right, and there is no need to worry about me. I shall be at the Imperial Hotel within a few hours after you—perhaps before. Take the right-hand gully. Go slowly at first and be careful not to throw up any dust. If you find a boat get rid of the ponies. Don't give them away; turn them loose as soon as you see your way clear on the river. Now off with you; I have got to get back to the entrance."

He saw the rebellion in Helen's eyes.

"*Au revoir*, Miss Remsden," he said. "Let me help you mount. I assure you that I am in no more danger in remaining than you in going—probably less. On my word of honor!"

She looked deep into his eyes and slowly blushed.

"If you do not arrive when you say, within a few hours of us," she said, so low that Remsden, for all his straining ears, could not catch the words, "I shall come back after you."

McNeill saw them disappear into the gully, his hat off to the girl, and then hastened down again to the tunnel. He picked out one of the Mongols and pricked him ahead with his knife-blade until the latter showed himself reluctantly at the cave entrance.

Immediately there was a flash from the opposite cliff, the singing of a bullet, the *spang* of its lead on the rocky lintel of the cave and the echoing report. The Chinaman shrank back, and McNeill laughed.

"They meant that for me, Ba-ti," he said. "Presently I'll return the compliment."

He had no intention of firing where he was not sure of a target. Every moment gained helped Remsden and the girl and, when he did fire, he wanted to put the fear of his marksmanship into the priests. They thought they had him earthed. A good shot or so would make them cautious.

He tightened up the foot-ropes of the Mongol and put him back with the rest. Then he made a little barricade of loose stones and sat down to guard the ledge. He did not dare expose himself to harass those in the ravine but he hoped that they would attempt to rush the narrow path.

Two hours passed and then a fusillade of bullets smashed about the cave mouth and buzzed down the tunnel. The corners of McNeill's mouth turned up into a little grin. He squinted down the ledge, lying flat in a conduit he had made of the rocks, thrusting his rifle through a niche.

As he expected, a rush was on. A cluster of racing figures turned a shoulder of rock and McNeill began firing rapidly, but with definite aim. Two figures leaped up and plunged into the gulf; another sprawled out on the ledge; a fourth dragged back around the buttress.

"That will keep them thinking for a while," McNeill told himself. "I wonder how about the other direction?"

He turned over and, even as he turned, heard the soft pad of swiftly running feet. The priests of Hoang Lung had split and had meant to attack simultaneously. Some inequalities of the path had hindered their perfect junction, and once again McNeill's rifle took heavy toll. Two men, shot almost simultaneously, whirled, clutched at each other and went spinning down.

"That'll teach 'em not to be in too much of a hurry," muttered McNeill as he slid fresh cartridges into the chamber while stray bullets still sung and splashed above him. "I don't believe they've got more than a couple of rifles at that," he told himself. "Now for the next move. I don't believe they'll try another rush—try and starve us out. I don't fancy they are worrying much about those Chinks I've got corraled. Neither am I. I wonder how many miles are left in that yellow cayuse."

His half-formed plan crystallized as he went back into the tunnel and flashed his torch over the bunch of bound Mongols. One man he selected as close to his own build, though lacking in height. This man he shuffled back to where the rest of the horses were stalled and, at the muzzle of his automatic, ordered him to strip. The man demurred, and McNeill clipped him on the jaw with his pistol, putting him out. Then he deftly peeled off the dirty, unsavory clothes and reluctantly put these on over his own underwear, after investing the Chinaman with the outer garb of Neill McNeill.

The battery of his torch was dimming, fast as he had worked, and it flickered entirely out before he had finished. But he got the limping pony to the top of the shaft and the Chinaman with it. He had collected the few things he meant to take with him and now, with the wondering, hating eyes of the Mongol watching him, he crawled through the bushes for a last survey of the enemy, crawled back and, with almost the last of his water supply, unflinchingly scraped off with a dull blade all the sprouting red growth on his jaws.

Then he surveyed the lay of the land. To one side, where, almost three hours before, Remsden and his daughter had made for the river, the fissures offered him ample cover. To the other the land opened to a flat plateau sparsely set with dwarf growths.

McNeill forced the Mongol to mount the tethered yellow pony that was in no way anxious to move, tied his feet under the animal's belly and his wrists to the saddle-horn. Once again he slid through the bushes and fired a random shot across the cañon. The echoes crashed as answering bullets came wildly back. He cut the tether, headed the pony for the plateau, pricked it sharply on the flank and fired a couple of shots beneath it that sent it flying fearfully through the scrub bearing a figure in European costume on its back, crouching to avoid the missiles that sped toward it at long range, and then McNeill dived swiftly into the nearest depression and, making the most of his start, fled for the Chang-Li stream.

At nightfall McNeill squatted by the wall of a hut. Outside its door the Chinese were gabbling the local gossip. The boat of Duk Sing had been stolen. Sing had found it gone when he started for the evening fishing. The boat had vanished, but a gold piece was lying by the tether picket, wrapped in a scrap of cloth. So Sing was lucky, for the boat was old. And Chee Foy had found two ponies with their saddles. It had been a great day, said Wong Lee, the headman. It was good to talk but he must be going, for the tide was right and they were waiting for his cargo in Peking. He envied Sing his luck; money was scarce.

As Wong Lee started to go aboard his cargo-boat where the polers only awaited his coming, a figure came out of the darkness and asked in the dialect of the district for a trip passage.

"Not free, oh Wong Lee," said the pleader as the headman scowled. "For, by the favor of my aunt, I have some small matter of money with me, and the trip is urgent. I am sick."

There was a fire burning on an iron plate amidships of the long craft with its thatched cabin and high prow. By the uncertain light Wong Lee looked doubtfully at the stranger. The man's head was bound up in filthy cloths that concealed all but a strip showing nose and cheek-bones. The brow bandage came so low as to hide the eyes.

"What is thy sickness?" asked Wong Lee. "And where is thy money?"

"It is not catching. Lo, I have been suffering long from decayed teeth and the night air brings on the pain, so I journey to Peking to seek a doctor. Here is half of what I possess."

Out of the waistcloth in which his automatic was tucked away handily, McNeill produced some copper cash and two small pieces of gold. He held these out on a palm blackened with dirt. Wong Lee swept all of it into his own paw.

"Get aboard," he said magnanimously. "I will send thee to a cousin of mine who is a mighty doctor in Peking. Pole, pole swiftly, ye doghearts, the tide runs."

As the cargo boat shot out into the stream, McNeill, glancing back, saw torches suddenly break out in the village and heard the racket of voices that betokened the sudden arrival of some cavalcade. Some one ran down toward the river-landing swinging a flare and shouted, but Wong Lee, with an oath, took no notice and the craft shot swiftly down the broad stream. None but the boatmen had seen McNeill and that at the last moment. If the new arrivals were the priests of the Hoang-Lung they had no reason to suspect the entirely regular departure of Wong Lee. There came a bend in the stream and the shouts and lights died out, and McNeill cuddled down on some mats in the cabin, groaning a little from time to time about the decayed teeth that he was forced to protect against the night air.

CHAPTER III

THE FEATURES OF FUNG-TI

AFTER nine years of wanderings in interior China, prospecting, engineering, adventuring, Neill McNeill, with his knowledge of customs and dialects, was comparatively at home in Peking. He changed his filthy rags for Occidental raiment at a native tailor's who was to him more of a friend than a mere tradesman and, thus rehabilitated, hurried to the Imperial Hotel.

On the trip of the cargo-boat he had found no trouble in picking up the trail of the eccentric American and his daughter. Remsden, with a smattering of Chinese, was no fool and, once free from immediate pursuit, he had got together an escort and traveled with speed and comfort.

McNeill's connection with him would soon be over, the latter thought regretfully. He meant to take no bonus, for, however much he admired the stepdaughter, he had a very whittled-down estimation of Remsden and his selfishness that would deliberately expose the girl to frightful risk through his own rash actions. But McNeill meant to see them both safely out of the country.

The cult of the Hoang Lung, the guardians of the holiest of all shrines, was powerful and Remsden's offense, which must have been a serious one, would not be lightly condoned. Remsden was apt to consider himself safe in the foreign quarter and become careless. Trouble could easily happen, even on the train to Shanghai whence they would embark for the States, and it would be trouble of a kind that could not be remedied.

A fanatic follower of the Hoang Lung would think nothing of giving up his own life and risking torture if he achieved his object. Even the arm of the American government would be hard put to it to protect the travelers, and McNeill shrewdly surmised that the American minister would not be appealed to by Remsden too hurriedly, as the latter knew that confession of an attempt on his part to interfere with Chinese religious institutions would be met with disfavor.

It was with relief that McNeill passed through the arch into the hotel compound and entered the office of the Imperial. Miss Remsden was out, the clerk declared, but Remsden was in his room. A package had just been delivered for Mr. Remsden, and the Chinese boy who ushered McNeill to the suite carried this parcel with him.

McNeill was frowning when he entered the room. Remsden should not have allowed his stepdaughter on the streets unescorted, he thought, though of course he was not certain that this was the case. Remsden greeted him cordially enough.

"I'm glad to see you back, Neill, my boy," he said. "We were both anxious over your safety but I assured Helen that you would win through. We ourselves had a——"

"Where is Miss Helen?" broke in McNeill.

Remsden frowned at the interruption. He was looking curiously at the package the boy had brought, a box some eight inches square, wrapped in rice-paper on which was inscribed in good English Remsden's name and address.

"She wanted to buy some souvenirs for her friends at home," he said. "I believe she has gone to the Rising Sun Bazaar."

"Good ——, man!" cried McNeill. "You don't mean to say you let her go out alone?"

"The Rising Sun Bazaar is only two blocks away," replied Remsden. "It is in the foreign quarter. Have you lost your nerve, Neill?"

"You have taken leave of your senses!" said McNeill angrily, taking up his hat. He was going to the Bazaar without delay. "How long has she been gone?"

"Why, I hardly know," said Remsden leisurely, setting down his cigar and devoting both hands to the unwrapping of the package. "A little over an hour, I should say. I——"

His voice died away in an inarticulate choking that made McNeill, half-way to the door, turn and regard him sharply. Remsden's face was blotched, his jaw sagged, his pop-eyes seemed actually starting from their sockets and they were lit with a horror that showed in his mottled, shaking jowls and the trembling hands which were still suspended above the box that he had opened.

McNeill crossed to him, picked up the box and shook out the objects it contained on a newspaper that Remsden had been reading. A scrap of paper closely covered with small, beautifully written Chinese script fluttered after them. Remsden stared, still incapable of action, fascinated by the grisly things before him.

These were the half-desiccated lips, ears and eyelids of a man, the black lashes, gummy with dried blood, still clung to the latter.

"What—what?" he muttered as McNeill rapidly translated the script.

> With his eyes, his lips, his ears, he betrayed.
>
> Now can Fung-Ti neither see wrong, nor speak falsely nor listen to the voice of the white devil who bribes.

"Fung-Ti?" muttered Remsden and looked up at McNeill who towered over him menacingly, the scrap of paper in his hands quivering.

"Do you know what the rest of this says?" demanded McNeill. "Listen!

> These are the lips and eyelids and the outer ears of Fung-Ti, the false priest, the thief, the betrayer.
>
> Within ten days restore the sacred relic or, what has happened to Fung-Ti, who still lives but prays to the gods he has betrayed that he may die, shall happen to the white woman who returns to the shrine of Hoang Lung as hostage.
>
> First did we test Fung-Ti with the ordeal of the Brazen Serpent. Then did we sever the false members we send to you. It would he hard to tell now that Fung-Ti was once a man. Yet he lives.
>
> The limbs of the white woman are far more frail than those of Fung-Ti. They will shrink and shrivel in the twist of the Bronze Serpent.
>
> Ten days we give you. Return the holy relic, and the girl shall be delivered to the messenger. Fail, and not only shall the girl die many deaths but thou and the man who was with thee shall know the vengeance of the Hoang Lung though ye hide in caverns at the bottom of the sea.
>
> See that ye do this secretly. For, if ye appeal to the governments or speak to any that the Shrine of Hoang Lung has been dishonored, in that same hour shall ye all die."

◆

SO MENACING was the look with which McNeill regarded Remsden that the latter threw up his shaking hands in a semblance of defense.

"For the love of God, Neill!" he whimpered.

"Stop your blasphemy," said the Irishman. "Do you know what the Brazen Serpent means, Remsden? They twine copper tubes about your legs and arms and waist and then they fill the tubes with boiling water. That is what they threaten to do to——"

He struck the heavy table such a smash with his doubled fist that the panel split and the horrible bits of Fung Ti danced on the paper. "Out with that relic, Remsden! Out with it!" he demanded. "They have got Helen! Give it to me so I can go after her!"

"Ten days, they said—ten days. The shrine is only five days' journey."

McNeill gripped Remsden by the shoulders and, heavy as he was, shook him as a terrier would shake a rat.

"You would temporize with the girl's safety?" he cried. "I'll tell you this, Remsden. If one hair of her head has been harmed when I return—and I shall return—I will make you wish you had been Fung-Ti. Where is this relic?"

"Wait," said Remsden, shrinking into his chair on his release but with his face sullen with the piggish obstinacy he could assume. I can not give it to you. I haven't got it. I can't get it again before forty-eight hours. There will be plenty of time."

"Remsden, you lied to me before in the cave. You are lying now."

"I did not lie to you. I said that you might search me. I did not have it with me. Helen had it then, though she did not know it. It was in my wallet. I told her it bothered me in riding, and she carried it."

McNeill's utter loathing pierced even Remsden's armor.

"I am not lying now," he asserted doggedly. "I may be able to get it back a little sooner than forty-eight hours. But I haven't it and that's the flat truth."

McNeill, his eyes burning within a few inches of the other's, told himself that Remsden was telling the truth.

"I am going to give you just twenty-four hours to produce it," he said. "During that time I am going to make preparations that will insure the safety of Miss Helen. If you haven't got it back by then you are going to be a very unhappy man for the rest of your life. You are not my employer in this matter; you couldn't hire me with your money to go back. I am going on my own account. You can pay me what you do owe me, however, as I shall need immediate cash."

Remsden detached certain travellers' checks from their sheaf and passed them over to McNeill.

"It is no use threatening me," he said. "I will get it as soon as I can—not later than forty-eight hours. That gives us a margin of three days. They will not injure her."

"What is this relic?" demanded the younger man.

Remsden's eyes glowed. He seemed to recover his self-assurance. The man was a trifle mad, with the frenzy of a collector, McNeill decided, as Remsden poured himself some whisky and tossed it down with a hand not yet steady.

"What do you know about Chinese mythology, Neill?" he asked.

"Not very much."

McNeill resented the smug manner of Remsden's speech but he was anxious to learn what he could about the relic.

"Ah! Perhaps you know that they believe that originally the land was ruled by the dragon kings, lords of air, land and sea?"

McNeill nodded.

"Well, in the holy shrine of Hoang Lung is supposed to be kept an actual claw of the last of the dragon kings—a claw set in gray jade carved to represent the sheath of the claw and also inscribed with runes that even the great Lao T'se could not interpret. This claw is probably that of a great cave-bear; it is of non-retractile type. It is evidently very old. It might even have come from some monster of prehistoric times. The point is that it is believed indubitably to be the claw of the dragon, and the temple of the Hoang Lung is worshiped as its repository."

"And you got it? How?"

Remsden almost beamed with self-satisfaction.

"I got up the expedition to the temple. I am not a Mason but I have knowledge of the ancient universal rituals and symbols from which modern Masonry has borrowed. They have been long known to the older dynasties of ancient nations, China included. Through their use I was received by the priests, as you know, and observed their ritual, something but one other white man has ever done. I noted that the claw was not a myth. Fung-Ti did the rest for a very large sum of money that was packed in the box carried by the smaller camel, the box you, with all the rest, thought carried cartridges."

"I thought some one had stolen that," said McNeill under his breath.

"Just how Fung-Ti accomplished the theft I do not know. I left the particulars to him. He has been frightfully punished, but he knew his risk. Under ordinary circumstances nothing would have been discovered for a full month, by which time Fung Ti would have been far away, had it not been for that shower of shooting stars the night after we left the temple. The priests of Hoang Lung imagine such phenomena the golden scales shaken from the dragon gods in anger, and I suppose they investigated. It was an unfortunate coincidence.

"The claw was without doubt the most wonderful curio in the world. It would have brought me fortune. I preferred fame. Now I have lost both," he sighed.

McNeill regarded him keenly. The sigh hardly seemed genuine, but he was determined that Remsden should not leave his sight until the relic reappeared from wherever it had been deposited. That Remsden should have let it leave him for a moment seemed incredible, but he was certain that in that matter the collector had not lied. For the rest he was an incipient lunatic so far as curios were concerned.

"I want you to go out with me for a while," said McNeill. "And I shall take the connecting room to this suite."

"Where are we going?"

"To pass the word to certain men that I know," said McNeill. "I am going on this return trip with an escort of he-men, Mr. Remsden. I take it you would prefer to stay in Peking. I should recommend the embassy after we have gone, if they will shelter you. Come on!" His tone was that of sheriff to his prisoner. For a half moment Remsden rebelled.

"Very well," he said at last. "Any more funds that are necessary?"

"If I run short I'll borrow some from you," snapped McNeill. "Come on!"

THIRTY-SIX hours later McNeill seated in his room next to that of Remsden whom he could hear impatiently padding up and down, listened to a knock on Remsden's door and to Remsden opening it. Some one who talked in a voice of high pitch that was almost instantaneously hushed to a whisper, was admitted. McNeill rose and softly opened his own door to the corridor. Presently he heard the chink of gold and Remsden's door reopening.

He gilded to where his own entrance stood ajar, the light out in his room, and saw, gliding along the passage, the bowed form of an old Chinaman who was stowing away something in his capacious blouse. The face of wrinkled yellow skin, drawn tight as a drumhead over the skull, showed little, but the eyes, looking furtively from left to right, held the look of one who gloats over greed satisfied and is yet possessed with deadly fear.

Moreover, McNeill recognized the man as the master-craftsman of all Peking's artificers in precious metals and gems, in pearl and ivory—Ling Yuan, the greatest connoisseur of all the Orient in such works of art.

It seemed evident to him where the claw had been. For some reason Remsden had consulted Ling Yuan as to the authenticity of the claw, fearing perhaps that Fung-Ti had played him false, though the awful mementoes of that false priest had since furnished mute proof of his having really obtained the actual relic. Wondering a little what enormous sum Remsden must have demanded from Ling Yuan as pledge for the return of the claw, McNeill turned on his light and closed the barely opened door without noise. The next instant Remsden appeared in the entrance between the rooms.

"I have the claw," he said. "Take it, Neill, and save Helen."

McNeill took it—a little thing to represent the burning, mystical faith of the most mysterious nation of the world. The claw itself was black with age, and far longer than that of any animal that Neill had ever seen, sharply curved, set in gray translucent jade which was scaled where it gripped the claw and, above that, deep cut with hieroglyphs. He opened his belt and shirt and put the thing away in a pocket of his money belt.

"I shall find a better place for it presently," he said.

Remsden sighed as he saw it disappear.

"It was a costly experiment," he said. "How early do you start?"

"Immediately," said McNeill. "There is not a moment to lose. We shall travel fast, but there may be delays. My men are waiting for me now."

CHAPTER IV

OCCIDENT AGAINST ORIENT

THE temple of the Hoang Lung, the Shrine of the Dragon's Claw, lies in a natural amphitheater, the buildings of stone and sun-dried brick standing in a horseshoe of steep hills that are honeycombed with caves and fissures, some of which are used as dwellings for the priests. The entrance to the horseshoe is winged across with stone walls that connect with high arches, also of stone and carved with weird representations of the dragon gods and their lesser attendant divinities.

There are three of these arches and they were undoubtedly built to serve as defenses against marauders from the north. They were built many hundreds of years ago, perhaps thousands, and their carvings are smudged with the rasp of wind and rain and desert sands, and there are deep interstices where once the stone blocks met with exact precision.

A modern field gun would knock one to pieces in two shots; yet, inasmuch as field guns have never neared the shrine, they are still considered, in the light of legend and dim history, impregnable when the wooden gates, reinforced heavily with metal, are closed.

At nightfall of the fifth day after their start from Peking, the seventh since the ultimatum of the priests had been delivered to Remsden, a party of white men were camped in the hills some three miles from the town and temple of Hoang Lung. By the light of the fire about which they sat at a war-council with their pipes or cigarets going, they were a hard-bitten, lean and capable looking crowd, eighteen of them in all—volunteers under McNeill to get a white girl out of Hoang Lung.

Engineers, prospectors, adventurers of sorts they were and all were known to McNeill personally. They represented every loose and available white man in Peking or its vicinity who could get away for such a trip. Their ages varied from twenty-two to fifty, and they were all as hard as nails. Every one of them knew how to handle a gun and was not afraid to do so. Better, they knew when not to do so.

McNeill stood apart in talk with a bearded man who had built many miles of railroad in interior China only to see his work undone by fanatic hordes, urged on by the priests. Neill's field-glasses were slung at his sides, and he unbuckled the case and took them out.

"The moon'll be up in a few minutes, Wilson," he said. "It's lightening over the eastern ridge now. Canfield and I are going in alone on foot as soon as it rises. After we've fixed things at the first arch we'll camp in one of the caves. I'll go in soon after dawn—alone."

"It seems foolhardy to do that, Neill," said Wilson. "Wouldn't at least a display of force help out? Of course you're running this show."

"I've gone over it very carefully," said McNeill. "I've got to make the play single-handed. At eight o'clock, if they are not coming through, you know what to expect. If I don't show up here by nine, or you don't see me coming, then you take command and do whatever you think best, not forgetting that it is more than probable that Miss Remsden and myself will be past doing for.

"Here comes the moon. Now then, take the glasses and look about sou'-west-by-sou'. There are parallel ridges leading in that general direction and Canfield and I will keep the valleys, though I don't think there is much fear of a lookout. They are expecting us, no doubt, but it is our move and they are not likely to be worrying about it. We are three days to the good. You can use the ridges for cover tomorrow if things go wrong with me."

Wilson, the glasses to his eyes, only grunted. The arches, particularly the first one, were plain to see, their stones silvered by the moon, now clear of the ridge.

"'S up to you," said Wilson at last, "till eight o'clock tomorrow. Then it's up to me. Goin' to take horses?"

"No. Less noise, less risk. We can pack all we need easily enough. A good deal depends on getting our work done absolutely unobserved."

"If you don't come back," said Wilson gruffly, "or if they've done anything to that girl, I'm telling you one thing, McNeill, before noon tomorrow the inhabitants of Hoang Lung are going to think hell, or whatever their heathen equivalent for Gehenna is, has opened under their feet. We've got the stuff to do it with and we've got the boys who know how to use it."

They walked back to the rest of the expedition in silence. McNeill had deliberately shut off from his mental vision all thoughts of what might have happened to Helen Remsden. Suggestions of bronze tubes filled with boiling water and twisted around her dainty limbs, thoughts of all the fantastic refinements of devilish torture that might be practised upon her, he deliberately dismissed as unnerving and destructive to the job in hand.

He did not trust the priests. Once they had obtained the claw, they would be likely to endeavor to get revenge on those who had had any hand in the defilement of the sacred relic. He had laid plans accordingly.

Canfield came forward to meet them, the youngest of the troop, a man absolutely reckless, once given his head, but possessing the rare quality of being able to take orders from a man he acknowledged capable of giving them.

"Ready to go, McNeill?" he asked.

"If you are."

"Righto," returned Canfield, Britisher and younger son. "Got all my little duds packed for the picnic."

"Then we're off," announced McNeill.

The talk stopped, pipes and cigarets were taken briefly from mouths that quietly wished "good night" and "good luck," and the two started on their hike.

* * *

AN HOUR and a half later two figures glided away from the dark shadow of the first arch and, blending in the inequalities of the cliff face, after they had passed the length of the stone wall in a low crouch, carefully paying out a thin thread as they went, disappeared in a niche where the face of the precipice had warped apart. There they compared watches carefully.

"We'll check again in the morning, Canfield," said McNeill. "I want to pull this thing off to the second, if possible. It's three o'clock now. These priests are a lazy crowd. I won't start until seven and even then they won't be stirring. That gives us four hours—two apiece for sleep. I'll take the first watch."

"You're on," said Canfield and curled up in the crevice like a tired dog.

At seven o'clock McNeill left the little fissure and descended unnoticed to the flat ground in front of the first arch. There was no sound of gong, no sign of life within the enclosure. The gates were shut, and he knew the frowsy sentinel slept inside. The holy priests of Hoang Lung were not ascetics. So far as they could obtain it, they lived upon the fat of the land and denied themselves nothing, and, by virtue of the claw, their tribute was universal and munificent.

At fifteen minutes after seven McNeill took a whistle from his pocket and blew on it shrilly. A wicket in the upper leaf of one gate was drawn back, and the sleepy eyes of a watchman peered out, widened as they saw the solitary white devil, and suddenly disappeared.

It was fifteen minutes more before the gates were opened and a group of yellow-robed and shaven priests appeared, escorted by a score of so-called soldiery, armed with a nondescript array of swords, wide-bladed spears, muskets and rifles of all vintages. In their midst McNeill walked through to the inner courtyard.

A short, fat priest advanced. He was ancient. His avoirdupois spoke eloquently of self-indulgence, and his face, projecting from the draped hood that puffed about his full neck, held no more expression than that of a turtle. The small eyes showed merely life, no more emotion than if they had been insets of jet.

"Tao Chan?" asked McNeill.

This had been the name of the writer of the letter to Remsden, the name of the head priest of Hoang Lung.

Tao Chan acknowledged the dignity.

"You have brought back the claw?" he demanded.

"Is the hostage safe?" parried McNeill.

"To talk in questions is to waste time," replied the priest. "First answer me."

"I can make delivery of the claw."

"The girl is unharmed."

"Then show her to me."

"Show me the claw."

McNeill laughed, and a red light came into the jetty eyes of Tao Chan.

"It is not wise to make a mock of the guardian of the claw," he said.

"It is not wise to take a white man for a fool, O guardian that has no claw to guard," answered McNeill. "Show me the girl!"

There had been no apparent sign, but the priests fell back and the guards edged in toward the Irishman.

"Touch me and I destroy your temple," he said confidently.

It was Tao Chan's turn to laugh, but a grin was the nearest he could come to it.

"You speak boldly," he sneered.

McNeill was gaging his time, looking covertly at the hands of his wrist-watch.

"The bargain was to exchange the girl for the claw," he said. "You know I must be able to produce the claw or I would not have traveled so far. I must know that you can produce the girl."

Tao Chan's immutable face gave no sign, and McNeill's heart sank, then rose again. If they had injured her? To them the life of a white maiden, save as they could use it for torture, was nothing. He tried a lead on this line.

"Also there are many thousands of white maidens, O Tao Chan, and but one claw."

"There is but one maiden for thee, white man."

"And yet there are thousands, aye millions, who hold thee responsible for the claw," challenged McNeill. "If I return not with the girl in safety, all China will know how Tao Chan has been outwitted by the foreign devils, and I do not think what is left of thy life will be happy. Show me the girl."

Still no visible sign, but the guards inched in. It seemed clear to McNeill that the whole thing had been planned before the gate was opened. They meant to get the claw and wreak their vengeance on McNeill and the girl, if she was not already sacrificed. He looked at his watch. It was five minutes of the hour.

"I have warned you," he said. "Do you think I was fool enough to come here alone with the claw upon me? There are yet three days within which to deliver it. It is not far from here but in a place where you can never find it. First I must know whether you can keep your side of the bargain. Show me the girl."

"I think you can be made to tell where the claw is," said Tao Chan softly.

"I do not know where it is," said McNeill. "So I can not tell you."

He spoke with such utter conviction that Tao Chan's face twitched. He believed that the foreign devil might be telling the truth. He gave an order. It was repeated back to where guards lounged on the steps of the quaintly-roofed temple. The lacquered doors opened, and the figure of Helen Remsden appeared between two priests, who stepped back a little from her. She gave a little cry, and McNeill, whimsically conscious of the incongruity of the action, took off his helmet. Then the doors closed again.

"We shall not torture you the first," said Tao Chan very quietly. "First you shall watch us work with the girl. After that you may not care to live. But we shall give you certain chances from time to time to bring in the claw. You foreign devil," he continued almost in a monotone that threatened the more with its repression, "did you think you could ravish the shrine of the dragon god and go unscathed? Fung-Ti has been punished. So shall all the rest of you be punished. Your prayers for pity shall lack lips to utter them."

"Touch me," said McNeill, "and I shall shoot you through the belly, Tao Chan. Just one tiny touch—I have you covered now from my pocket—and you will be explaining to your gods why you could not keep their claw. I give you one chance. Tell your men to fall back, bring out the girl in a palanquin borne by four priests. You and four more shall accompany me to the spot where the claw will be turned over to you. Will you do this?"

For the last few seconds marked by the march of the hands on McNeill's watch, the two men, Occidetal and Oriental, held a duel of glances.

IN THE fissure Canfield stooped above a little instrument of polished wood and brass. For fifteen minutes he had been expecting to hear McNeill's whistle. Now he knew that the little lesson they had arranged was to be given, and he glanced at his own watch and looked over his adjustments with nerveless thoroughness.

"No," bluffed the high-priest.

Back of them there was a muffled roar, a swift suggestion of exploding gases, a cloud of smoke that mushroomed, in which fragments of masonry lofted and rushed down again while the outer arch crumbled and dissolved before the eyes of Hoang Lung.

McNeill had not moved a muscle. Now he put the question again.

"Will you do this? Or shall I destroy the shrine?"

Tao Chan thought rapidly. He guessed somewhat of the means employed to level the arch. But it had been done very cleverly, and he could not offset the terror of his ignorant underlings by a talk on dynamite. To them it was all magic. McNeill seemed very confident, and Tao Chan felt that the white man might use more of this magic wisdom to carry out his threat. True, the girl was in the Temple, but——

He looked at his panic-stricken guards, at the uneasiness of his priests, trained as they were to avoid emotion, and he looked at McNeill, jaunty, nonchalant, all save his eyes, which were bits of steel. The white devil might sacrifice the girl. They did such things when they were desperate, to save them from torture. The claw must come back. He metaphorically tossed in his cards. He was still qualmish in the stomach that McNeill had threatened.

Once more he gave an order, whereupon McNeill whipped out his whistle and sounded it twice.

Canfield picked up his battery and connections and strolled out of his cave.

"Worked like a charm," he said to the lizards that flickered before him. "A little bit of all right, that."

A BAFFLED mob clustered about the ruins of the outer arch and sullenly watched the palanquin borne by the priests depart under the command of the two white devils.

McNeill and Canfield walked one on either side of the chair and talked through the drawn curtains of elaborately embroidered silk to the rescued Helen Remsden. McNeill and Helen did most of the talking, Canfield noticed, and, being a goods sport, he filled in the time smoking cigarets.

So they came to the camp in the hills, traveling the crest of the ridge, despite the sun, for McNeill wanted to make sure they were not followed. Amid the ring of men the priests set down the palanquin.

"Now," demanded Tao Chan as the girl stepped out, "I have kept faith. Where is the claw?"

"What did you do with it, Wilson?" asked McNeill. "I told our bloated friend here that I did not know where it was, but he would not believe me."

Tao Chan, not knowing the language of the foreign devils, glowered at them suspiciously.

"The white men also keep faith, Tao Chan," said McNeill. "Give it to him, Wilson."

The bearded man solemnly uttered a jargon of meaningless syllables. He was in his rolled-up shirt-sleeves and he exposed his open hands back and front to Tao Chan and the priests.

"Can ye not see it?" he asked, speaking fluently the vernacular. "It was hidden in the air. Lord of air and land and water and of fire was the dragon king. He did but return the claw to its own and now, in promise kept, we bring it back again. Behold!"

He pointed to a spot just above the level of the wondering eyes of the priests. Then, between the thumb and forefinger of the other hand, suddenly appeared, by clever legerdemain, the claw.

A cry came simultaneously from the priests and all, save Tao Chan, dropped on hands and knees in obeisance. But Tao Chan, who could do some pretty conjuring himself upon occasion, frowned and took the relic. From his robe he produced a case of carven jade lined with golden silk, and reverently placed the claw within.

As the priests rose to his order they found themselves covered by the pistols of the expedition.

"You are going to take a little walk with us as far as the bamboo bridge across the Wu-liang chasm," announced McNeill. "To the other side of it, in fact. Then we'll say good-by and leave you with the claw—after we have destroyed the bridge. Doubtless you will find some roundabout way to get back to Hoang Lung. Do you want to ride in the palanquin, Miss Helen, or would you rather have a horse? We brought a spare one for you."

"A horse, please," said the girl. "I haven't been treated at all badly, Mr. McNeill, but the sooner I can get away from everything Chinese the better I shall be suited."

McNeill translated to Tao Chan, into whose face came the suggestion of satisfaction. He appropriated the abandoned palanquin to his own uses, and from there to the bridge the priests spelled each other in carrying his redundancy.

It did not take the little corps of experts long to destroy utterly the bridge of heavy bamboos, ingeniously cantilevered by the Chinese across the deep split, and then they left the discomfited Tao Chan to lead his men back to Hoang Lung as best he could. Straight for Peking they headed, well mounted, exuberant, losing no time.

Helen Remsden told them the details of her carrying off. As McNeill had suspected—had practically known—there were members of the Hoang Lung affiliated with practically every bazaar in Peking, and, when she had walked into the Rising Sun Bazaar, she had walked into a trap that was promptly sprung, a trap that was only one of a long line set for her throughout the city.

"I wanted a mandarin coat or two," she said, "to take home for gifts. I thought the Rising Sun, with almost always an American or European customer at every counter, was safe. Mr. Remsden said nothing to the contrary. But, when I left the hotel, I fancied a Chinaman who was loafing about the compound noticed me particularly and when I was in the Bazaar I was almost certain that this same man came in and spoke to one of the clerks. This clerk spoke to the man serving me.

"I fancy I showed some suspicion, or surprize, and it only shows how clever they were, for the man who was waiting on me, one of the principals of the Bazaar, I fancy, who talked beautiful English, asked me almost instantly if I knew the man. I told him that I did not know him but thought I had seen him before at the hotel.

"He appeared to get very angry and told me that the man wanted a commission on anything I bought, claiming he had recommended me to the Rising Sun. He rated the man, who slunk out. I knew, of course, that such a thing was very likely to happen, and that almost every tourist purchase has a squeeze or two behind the price. It sounded a natural explanation and I thought no more of it.

"I had especially asked for a pomegranate-colored mandarin coat and they had nothing of that shade, or near it, in the lot brought me. Doubtless they took care there was not. At all events, the man seemed disturbed that he did not have one to suit me and called out in Chinese. After the answer he smiled and said that a consignment from Sze-Chuan province had just arrived and was being unpacked and priced. Would I come and see them as they came out of the bale, and take my pick?

"I went into a room at the back of the place. As I passed through the door something was clapped to my face, a cloth saturated in some pungent drug, and that was all I knew until I found myself inside a stuffy palanquin on camel-back, crossing the desert.

"The rest you may imagine. I was fairly well treated and I knew that Mr. Remsden would arrange for my release. I thought—I hoped," she added, a little shyly, "that he would send you, Mr. McNeill."

McNeill, remembering how he had handled Remsden in the matter, smiled a bit grimly.

THEY were traversing a little rocky defile that led down to the Chang Li stream when a horseman approached them. The diminutive pony was being pushed to its top speed by a Chinaman who swayed in his saddle from weariness. When they came up to him, for he could not avoid them in the rocky pass, they saw he was an old man, far too ancient to be attempting such a ride without escort.

He rode his pony to one side along the slant of the piled-up talus of the ravine, staring at the party half curiously, half furtively. The sight of the girl on the horse seemed to fascinate him. Then McNeill, who, with Wilson, had been playing rear-guard from a possible pursuit and surprize, came galloping up and the Chinaman shrank on his saddle to a mere bundle of clothes, hiding his mummy face by pulling down the folds of the turban-like head-gear he wore against the sun.

But McNeill had recognized him, though he did not seek to detain him. It was Ling Yuan, the connoisseur, the master-craftsman, the man he had seen in the corridor of the Imperial, to whom Remsden had so mysteriously entrusted the claw. In the Chinaman's face was the same mixture of satisfied greed and furtive alarm.

"He'll be a bit late with his news," thought McNeill and dismissed him from his thoughts.

Next nightfall they rode through the outskirts of Peking, the cavalcade gradually breaking up as they reached the foreign quarter, only Wilson and Canfield riding with McNeill and the girl through the archway of the hotel courtyard.

McNeill dismounted, went in and came out with the news. Remsden had, doubtless by cabled influence, obtained lodging at the legation. His daughter was to join him there and tomorrow they would start by rail for Shanghai.

"That is bully," said McNeill. "If I remember right, you'll just catch the *Cathay*. We'll see you to the legation."

"Aren't you going to stay there?" asked the girl. "It's just as dangerous for you."

"I haven't got the drag of Mr. Remsden," smiled back McNeill. "I shall be safe enough. The bunch of us will celebrate our little expedition together. I shall see you on the train tomorrow."

"Then you are coming to Shanghai?"

Wilson in his wisdom had drawn Canfield aside.

"I am going across to the States," said McNeill, "if I can get a spare plank to bunk on. Bookings are heavy this time of year. You—you have no objection to my making the trip with you, Miss Helen?"

"What have I to do with it?" she challenged in sprightly fashion. Then her lashes fell before something in his gaze. "I owe everything to you, Mr. McNeill," she went on seriously. "My life—more than that. I do not know how I can repay you."

"I do," said McNeill. "I'll tell you how on the trip, perhaps."

But the girl, however grateful, was not to have her maidenly defenses overrun in the first assault.

"It will be nice to have some one to talk to," she said. "But I thought that your profession kept you in China, though I can imagine that father's folly may have jeopardized your usefulness."

"I am not a professional guide and interpreter, if that is what you mean," said McNeill. "Only upon occasion. I have made certain discoveries. I am going back to San Francisco to exploit them. Personally, I shall lie low in their development, but I hold a main interest in several projects that promise well."

"But you—Mr. Remsden thought that you—" She broke off in charming confusion as she sensed his reasons for acting as guide to her stepfather.

"There were unusual reasons for my

attachment to your stepfather—and yourself," said McNeill. "Here is the legation and there is Mr. Remsden. Good-by until tomorrow."

He raised his helmet as the girl turned from greeting her father and waved her hand to him. Then he joined Wilson and Canfield, still discreetly in the background.

"I happen to know that old Chu Lee has got some Pommery still stowed away," he said. "Let's get the gang together and celebrate."

"Celebrate or congratulate?" drawled Canfield.

"You pay for the champagne, Canfield," said McNeill imperturbably, "and you can take your choice."

CHAPTER V

SING LEE, LAUNDRYMAN

THE *Cathay* was an American ship and, aboard her, McNeill soon discovered himself a comparative nonentity beside Remsden.

The collector was not only rich but evidently powerful by the deference shown him at the legation and aboard the steamer. No bribes of McNeill's were able to get him closer to Helen Remsden than six seats away at the skipper's table and Remsden evidently was not disposed to encourage communications between an Irish adventurer whom he had employed as guide and his stepdaughter, presumably his heiress.

He was courteous enough and liberal enough with offers of reward that McNeill refused, but he pooh-poohed gently McNeill's allusions to his forthcoming exploitation of certain discoveries.

"I hope you'll make a go of it, Neill," he said. "Anything that I can do—but you say you have the capital in sight. It's the concessions that are so doubtful. The Chinese government is exceedingly unreliable and the various powers are envious of each other in these matters. But I wish you the best of luck."

There was a sap-headed son of a millionaire aboard who vied with several others in paying attention to Helen, and to this vapid specimen Remsden showed evident favor, though McNeill believed Remsden had better sense than to consider that Helen would accept these attentions seriously, or that Remsden would use the young man for anything more than a catspaw—a convenient and time-serving barrier against McNeill. Being free from the Hoang Lung pursuit, as he evidently believed, Remsden had every intention of shelving every one connected with it, including McNeill.

He developed a slight illness that McNeill shrewdly suspected was assumed and took advantage of it to keep his stepdaughter in close attendance upon him, with the young millionaire as a willing aide. At Honolulu he took the enamored youth and Helen for a long ride during the wait of the steamer, and McNeill whistled for a chance alone with the girl. Moreover the words of Remsden bore some weight. McNeill had no right to court the girl unless his future was assured instead of merely being rosy-hued, as at present.

And so, in the rare moments when he had the girl alone, he did not tell her, as he had hinted at Peking, how she could repay him for bringing her safely out of danger. He was the last man to bid for a girl's love because he had done what any red-blooded man would do for a girl in peril. Mutual desire was the only thing on which to base happiness, he decided. If he could avow his love, backed by worldly wealth to attend to all her comforts, and, if she showed him his love might not be unacceptable, then he would put the matter to the test.

Meanwhile he must attend to his own affairs in San Francisco while they went to New York by the first train, leaving four hours after the *Cathay* docked. So, with their New York address and a snapshot taken on deck, he was reluctantly content.

But he did not fail to warn Remsden that all danger might not be over. The Chinese were clannish and the power of the Hoang Lung reached wherever chopsticks were used and punksticks burned. They had back their claw, but they had been flouted. They might seek revenge.

"Poppycock, my dear Neill," smiled Remsden. "Not in America—not nowadays. Even hatchetmen and tongs are out of date. I appreciate your anxiety for my health and that of my daughter, but once in the United States I can well take care of myself—and her. Good-by. You must let me know how you come out with your schemes. I may be able to help you over some hitch—international politics, you know. I am not without some influence in such things."

Neill McNeill had a desire to tell Remsden just what he thought of his complacent selfishness but he repressed it. The train was starting and his opportunity for a personal farewell was going a-glimmering with Remsden's purposeful chatter. The vapid heir was going on the same train, it seemed, and buzzing about Helen like a hungry bee at sunset. The girl was not of Remsden's blood, McNeill thanked Heaven. He did not think many ties bound them save the one of duty on the girl's side, duty and a certain gratitude. And so he deliberately shouldered aside the scion of wealth and won his way to a last handclasp.

"You will let me know how things go, won't you?" she asked, and there was balm in the undoubted interest she expressed. "You have our address and, perhaps, you can make the communication personal?"

There was a suggestion of a blush and a tightening grip of the hand as she said this that recompensed Neill for the immediate bustling up of Remsden and the official remorselessness of the porter who warned that the train "was just stahtin'."

McNEILL took up his affairs in earnest, registering at the Palace and telephoning the members of his syndicate for appointments in a determination to be in New York within the week.

Four days went by and he had the thing well in hand. One man, who had been in the southern part of the State, remained to be seen, and the rest waited for that person's assent before going ahead with the development. McNeill had explained satisfactorily that he was *persona non grata* with certain elements in China and his wish not to superintend the comparatively simple problems of exploitation was willingly granted by those to whom he was the means of assured wealth.

"Fix it with Cox," they told him at a dinner at the Bohemian Club. "Convince him—you've only to show him what you showed us—and we'll get to work with the lawyers tomorrow."

They were fine fellows, these Westerners, and McNeill felt elated as he left them. He went away early, for he had an appointment with Cox out at the latter's big house at San Mateo that evening.

As he swung briskly down town to the Palace, where he had ordered a car to take him down the peninsula, he fancied, as he had fancied more than once in his four days in San Francisco, that he was being followed. Probably not by Chinamen, for he had reflected that, if the Hoang Lung had by cable got word across to their affiliations on the coast, they would be too subtle to use such palpable shadows. There were many degraded white men, chained to Chinese autocratic dispensers of the drugs they craved, who would be willing to play the spy.

It was only the working of a sixth sense developed in the wilds, but McNeill, though he could pick out no special person on the busy streets, thought enough of the hunch to slip an automatic in his pocket when he took seat in the tonneau of the big car that was soon gliding south to the fashionable suburb.

There were other cars on the road. Many they overtook, but none passed them or seemed to be trailing. Yet McNeill was keenly alive to the fact that the fat priest at Hoang Lung might smart for revenge and impart that revenge to his proselytes as a holy thing to be consummated.

He had warned Remsden. He had even warned, more carefully, Helen. They were safer in New York than he was in California, but all three were still in jeopardy. Presently the thing might die down, he thought, as long as the claw had been restored. Things changed rapidly in China. A new government might frown on even the priests of ancient religions who endangered amicable relations by murdering the subjects of a friendly and powerful country from whom a new republic might need favors.

For the present he would look out and, when he got to New York, he would safeguard Helen as closely as she would permit. McNeill had no fear of not convincing Cox as to his proposition. Then there would be a good sum coming to him immediately and, with developments, he would be a rich man.

As they crossed the San Mateo line a fog began to thicken, but the driver was used to fogs and the road; the lamps were powerful and they kept on their way, making good progress, until finally they turned in between high walls through iron gates and rolled up to Cox's ornate Italian villa.

McNeill could not have been received more cordially by a member of his own family, though this is not a good simile, for McNeill was very much alone as far as relatives went. His host's hearty manner, evident interest and keen appreciation of his doings and their financial possibilities soon put McNeill altogether at ease with the world. Only one untoward incident occurred to disturb two hours of satisfactory business talk and establishment of social relations.

Cox ordered refreshments. The butler was a Chinaman. Cox's *ménage* was largely Chinese, he explained, and eminently satisfactory. As a butler the man was perfect—silent, careful, deferential. Not once did he seem to glance from beneath his smooth crescent lids at master or guest while he did his serving; but, as he left the room, McNeill caught one oblique glance from those sloe-black eyes directed at him through the reflection of a mirror. The eyes seemed to appraise, to check up, to menace.

McNeill knew what strange tricks imagination plays when one allows any subject of peculiar interest to one's mental or physical welfare to once become dominant. Still he was glad to find the fog had lifted when his car was ordered and he stepped out into the quiet Californian night. Cox pressed him hard to stay until the next morning, when they would motor down together and complete the negotiations that would set McNeill free to go to New York—and Helen.

But, with the absence of the fog, the sense of danger seemed lessened. Moreover, if any was brewing, McNeill wanted to see it through. It was late and the driver started back at a good pace for the city. In less than half a mile, however, the engine began to stall and he got out for investigation. They were on the main road of the fairly populous suburb. On either side were Summer villas standing in considerable, well-tended grounds, behind walls or hedges, as the owners' fancy chose.

The chauffeur tinkered and overhauled and at last investigated the gasoline tank in default of better explanation of their trouble. He gave a sharp exclamation.

"Empty!" he said. "I told them to fill it up at the garage. We ought to have six or seven gallons and there ain't a drop."

"Did you see it filled?" asked McNeill.

"No, I didn't. But they never bunked me this way before."

"What did you do while I was with Mr. Cox?"

"Chewing the rag with his driver. They got two touring cars and a big limousine. He was in the butler's pantry. He's a Chink but he sure treated me white. I guess I'd better go back and get some gas from Mr. Cox's driver. He won't be in bed yet. Two or three gallons 'll get this boat in."

"All right," said McNeill. "Hurry!"

The man started down the road and he watched him turn into the gates of the villa. There were a few lights in the nearer houses and the sound of music came from one of them. It was all very quiet and peaceful.

THEN, with a rush, they were on him. Two figures hurled themselves over the low wall to his right; he heard the swift patter of footsteps from behind as he stood at the rear of the car. Instinctively he backed up to it and felt for his pistol. The gun was gone. The Chinese butler had helped him on with his light coat and deftly lifted it.

The two assailants were coming for him, head on. Even in the uncertain light he felt sure they carried no weapons. Swiftly he reached out his long, sinewy arms, cupped a head in either palm and brought them together with a thud that dropped the two senseless in the dust of the road.

Then something flickered about his neck from behind. He knew what it was as it tightened. Some one had climbed into the tonneau and deftly slipped a bowstring about his neck. The cord tightened and sank into the flesh, beyond his power to loosen. A red glare came before him and he felt consciousness slipping away.

Then sudden relief, though he sagged to the ground even as he sucked the air into his tortured lungs. The glaring headlights of a machine dazzled him as the oncoming car jarred to a standstill a few feet away, and two men jumped out and came toward him.

"What's up, old chap?" asked one of the strangers, giving him a hand.

McNeill saw that the two whose heads he had cracked had disappeared. So had doubtless his other opponent. It was a close shave. Only for these two night birds, who had obviously been celebrating, it would have been all off with Neill McNeill.

"We ran out of gas," he said, with some difficulty, for the cord had bitten deeply. "My man went back to the house there for a supply and I had a touch of vertigo. I haven't been very well."

"Vertigo? That's a new name for it, old pal," said the second man. "I'll have to spring that on my wife. We thought we saw a couple of chaps duck out, right and left, as we came along and then we saw you fall. Maybe we had vertigo ourselves."

McNeill summoned a laugh. He was not inclined to give his confidence now that he was well out of it. His driver was coming back with the gasoline in a can.

"I'm all right now, anyway," he said. "Thanks, both of you. And here's my driver."

The two got into their car and drove off while the chauffeur replenished the tank.

"See anything of the butler?" asked McNeill, as they got ready to start.

"Met him in the garden just now. Taking a stroll with a bit of a dinky pipe. Strange lot, them Chinks."

"I thought I saw him myself," said McNeill. "If I didn't, I felt him," he reflected and picked up from the seat beside him a souvenir of the occasion.

It was a slender cord of Chinese silk, flexible, singularly soft, but strong as catgut and bright yellow.

CHAPTER VI

NEW YORK

NEILL McNEILL walked out of Grand Central Station, scorning a taxicab. The hotel could send for his baggage. With all the fervor of one American born—New York born, at that—who has been expatriated for years in a barbaric kingdom, he wanted to see, smell and taste New York. He bought a paper but did not look at it. People interested him more than news so far. He was already wondering how soon he could call upon the Remsdens—upon Helen Remsden, to be exact. It was mid-morning and he would have to wait until afternoon he decided. But he could send some flowers, and did.

He walked down Fifth Avenue to his hotel, got his room, washed up and went out again on the streets. The unread paper was still in his pocket.

Still on the Avenue, enjoying the bustle of the crowds, the things in the shop windows, he came to Madison Square and sat down among the flotsam and jetsam of the city. Presently he pulled out the paper and gradually became more and more interested. On an inner page was a half-tone engraving of two men in the most modern of conventional attire, silk-hatted yet prominently foreign, Oriental. The caption read:

> Prince Liu Chi and his cousin, Prince Ten Shin, who have foresworn their ancient titles for China's new republicanism. They come to America as deputies of the new government to study the institutions and policies of the United States.

It was interesting reading to McNeill, though he wondered at the strange turn of mind that changed the descendants of so old a dynasty to such ardent liberalists. But the establishment of the new republic upon so firm a basis as to make its envoys recognized generally by the United States Government, as these princes seemed to be, to judge by what they had done and what programs were still in store for them officially, held a measure of comfort.

The old powers and traditions of Hoang Lung would die hard, but they might, in the rush of new thought and an open policy toward the Occident, die swiftly. Much of their power would be curtailed with their prestige. They would lie low awhile until the ever turning kaleidoscope of awakening China shifted to a new pattern of the same varicolored parts.

There would be a lifting of the ban against the desecrators of the shrine, and the followers of the old legendary faiths would be content with the restoration of their relic. He wondered if Prince Liu Chi or his cousin had heard of the outrage. If so their racial traits would hold the memory despite the camouflage of New World veneer. China's ancient faith would not change with its policies, save outwardly. The two nobles were registered at his own hotel, he noted.

Another article flashed at him as he turned the page. It was not a lengthy one, but the headlines leaped at him, making the half-inch capitals that formed the name of Remsden seem as large as wood block freak captions. The article read:

> Howard Remsden, celebrated explorer and collector of things anthropological, recently returned from hazardous adventures in the interior of China, was last night unanimously appointed president of the Columbian Museum of Philological Research, a post of great honor among scientists who strive to build the ancient history of the races of the world. After making his speech of acceptance, Mr. Remsden formally presented the museum with a curio that is without parallel—a relic dating back to the myths of ancient China, no less an object than the long worshipped claw of one of the legendary dragon gods of the Flowery Kingdom.
>
> This morning Mr. Remsden is to deliver an address on this unique possession to the members of the museum and other invited savants. Among the guests will be the two visiting princes, Liu Chi and Ten Shin. While Prince Liu Chi, when interviewed last night at his hotel, laughingly deprecated any belief that the claw actually belonged to such a mythical demigod, he professed intense interest in viewing it and listening to Mr. Remsden.
>
> "Modern China looks at such things as a modern American might the relics of some Indian cairn," said Prince Ten Shin in corroboration of his cousin's attitude. "It is fitting that the most progressive of nations should hold such an antiquity. I understand there are certain characters carven upon the jade holder that may be of value to twentieth century research, from our standpoint. We shall certainly accept the invitation of the museum authorities."
>
> Both princes speak English fluently and seem entirely at home with our customs, which they have largely adopted.

This was a staggering thing and McNeill, mechanically folding up the paper, emitted so sharp a whistle that the passers-by looked at him curiously. But he paid no heed to them.

How could Remsden have presented the claw to the museum when, he, McNeill, had given it over to Tao Chan as ransom for the girl? Some jugglery had gone on here—jugglery that increased the danger to Remsden and his stepdaughter to the *n*th degree. The visit of the two princes could not be merely a coincidence. Their liberalism was palpably a blind and their real mission revealed. They were after the claw.

Yet the claw was with Tao Chan. It could not be possible that Remsden had regained it. He had literally fled from Peking. It was almost absurd to think there was another relic like it. McNeill was positive there was not. Even if there was, the possession of it—the gift of it to the museum would be as deadly.

The interview did not ring true to McNeill. It might have been reported correctly, but what did an American newspaperman know of the subtleties of the Oriental mind? No matter what story Remsden might have coined as to his obtaining possession of the relic, to exhibit such an object of reverence to the princes would be, in their eyes, little short of an insult—a sacrilege. They must surely know all about what had happened at the temple.

While Americans might think little of a Chinese museum having on show specimens of early American culture or crudeness, the claw had been imbedded for unrecorded centuries in the heart of all that was Chinese. It was interwoven with the very essence of ancestor worship. It was holy. No American who had not lived years in China could ever hope to see the differences of thought in such an affair. The racial ideas of the two nations were thousands of years apart. Even Remsden could not properly sense what McNeill felt.

Now the claw was in the museum and Remsden, in his blind pomposity, was elevated to the pinnacle he had been willing to spend so much—to risk so much—to obtain. But, in the eyes of the princes, for all their affectation of Occidental ideas, Remsden was a profaner of shrines, a robber of China's holy of holies. McNeill had to admit that the museum must have the claw, though how this had happened was a riddle hard to solve.

What would be the next move? pondered McNeill. An attempt to get hold of the claw, or swift and horrible revenge upon Helen, her stepfather and, perhaps, himself, if they knew of his presence in New York.

McNeill strove to unravel what might be in the minds of the two princes and then he started north for the Remsdens. It was vital that he should find out just what had occurred—what Remsden had done—where the claw came from. He wondered whether Helen had been present at the reception. The early evening editions came out, but there was nothing more in them. A Wall Street magnate had collapsed, and the market was in jeopardy. The Chinese princes were eclipsed, Remsden forgotten.

THE East Nineties reached and the house located, McNeill sent in his card by a serving man who elevated his eyebrows the slightest bit as he pronounced the name and then, ushering McNeill into a reception room, said—

"I'll see if Miss Remsden is at home, sir."

McNeill heard a door shut somewhere down the hall. Then he caught faint echoes of a voice he recognized as Remsden's. The man came back, demurely apologetic.

"Miss Remsden is not at home, sir. Gone out of town for a few days. Mr. Remsden said he would see you some other time, sir, regretting that he is very busy just now, sir. Yes, sir. I thank you."

McNeill had done nothing to render the man grateful and he went out to his still waiting taxi a little hurt, a great deal disappointed, and much more worried. At his hotel a note was awaiting him that had been brought by special messenger. It read:

> Dear Mr. McNeill:
>
> Your flowers were beautiful and it was very thoughtful of you to send them. I hope I am going to see you soon, but father seems for some reason opposed at present to your coming to the house.
>
> I am sure, however, that there will soon come an opportunity for thanking you in person better than I can by this brief note.
>
> Sincerely yours,
> Helen Remsden.

And the note was dated that afternoon and superscribed—

> This Afternoon,
> At Home.

"So that is how the wind blows?" said McNeill *sotto voce.* "The old boy thinks I'll bawl him out whatever yarn he puts up about getting the claw. For that I'm to be lied to and refused admittance. We'll see about that. I wonder if the fool thinks he is not in actual danger?"

He dressed for his lonely dinner for the sheer pleasure of wearing clothes long foreign to him, and the head waiter, recognizing an out-of-the-ordinary person in his appearance, gave him a good table just the right distance from the music and not far from where the Chinese princes were eminently enjoying an Occidental menu.

They were with a party of American men and women, the latter exploiting foreign magnates to their own gratification. No one seemed to look his way and he lingered over his own carefully chosen meal after the eastern royalty had left. His tip duly impressed his waiter, as did his word of thanks for service. The man lingered.

"I beg your pardon, sir," he said, "but the man who waited on them foreign chaps wanted to find out your name. Of course I didn't know it sir, but ——?"

"He could easily have got it, I suppose. Thanks."

"Ever been there, sir? China, I mean. I've got a cousin in Shanghai who sells sewing-machines. Doing well, too."

"Yes, I've been there. He should do well. Reserve this table for me tomorrow night, will you?"

"Yes, sir."

So one of the princes, or both, had been interested in him. Why? McNeill cogitated over that a long time that night before he went to sleep. And, in the morning, he fancied he began to see the answer.

The claw was to the fore in the papers once more. The museum had been broken into some time between two and three o'clock. Only the vigilance of the special watchmen had prevented serious vandalism. The intruders were masked. Only a glimpse had been caught of them in the Oriental gallery where the claw of the dragon king, presented by the newly elected president, was deposited. A protective agency man, felt-shod, had seen the marauders bending over the case in which the claw had been placed. He shouted and fired as the burglars rushed for an open window from which the netting had been removed. Two other watchmen had rushed to his assistance and a general alarm was turned in.

Blood was found on the windowsill, showing that the bullet of the watchman had been well aimed. Traces of a ladder, presumably of the extension variety, were found in the turf below the windows. It was said that a swift car had been seen breaking the speed limits in the vicinity of the museum. The police believed they had an important clew. Special precautions were to be taken to safeguard the curio.

Prince Liu Chi could not be reached this morning, the paper stated, having retired, but his secretary announced the sincere regrets of both their highnesses at the occurrence, coupled with an expression of thanks that the attempt had failed and a hope that the robbers would be given over to the justice of American law and order.

The telephone rang as McNeill was reading over the article the second time. It was Helen Remsden's voice he recognized.

"Can you come up here, right away?"

she asked, and her voice quivered with anxiety. "Father is dreadfully upset and wants to see you as soon as possible."

"I'm starting now," McNeill answered.

"Wants to make me his burden-bearer once more, I suppose," McNeill told himself as he hastily finished his dressing. "Well, I'm not going without breakfast for his sake."

CHAPTER VII

THE GLOVE OF VELVET

SOMETHING had surely happened to Howard Remsden. Gone was his attempt at patronizing McNeill, gone was his smug assurance. The man seemed to have shrunk like a balloon from which enough gas has escaped to make the outline flabby. His florid complexion was blotched and there were sagging pouches under his eyes, which themselves held a constant appeal. Something had evidently frightened Remsden badly and he clung to McNeill's hand as would a despairing swimmer to the rescuer.

McNeill was not particularly sorry for him and he did not pretend to be. It was the request of Helen Remsden and the look in her eyes that proclaimed him her champion, that made him more than barely civil to her stepfather. Moreover, whatever peril faced him included her. For his own, he was not bothering just then.

"I want you to read this first, Neill," said Remsden. "I am not good at Chinese script, as you know; then I'll tell you everything. They are after the claw!"

He lowered his voice as a servant entered the library where they were closeted, a magnificent room of carved paneling, carved furniture and gorgeous Oriental hangings and rugs.

"The men have come about putting up the bars, sir," said the servant, the same man who had refused McNeill permission to see Miss Remsden the day before. Neill held nothing against him for obeying orders—a flunkey must lie when his master tells him, he supposed—and today there was a deference in the man's manner toward the visitor that showed that he was universally regarded in the Remsden household as the man of the hour.

"Tell 'em to begin with my bedroom and Miss Remsden's, Jackson," said Remsden. "I'm having the windows all barred," he said. "The house is otherwise protected but, one never knows."

The hands of the collector and new president of the Philological Museum were visibly trembling. His cocksureness had evaporated but McNeill could not resist getting in one dig.

"Even in America?" he asked.

Remsden reddened.

"Even in America," he admitted. "There are subtle forces at work, McNeill. I feel them. Those two princes —— "

He shuddered and passed the scroll of ricepaper that had been fluttering in his nervous hands across to McNeill.

"I found this pinned to my coverlet this morning," he said. "Pinned by this."

He took from a drawer of the massive desk at which he was sitting a pin of soft gold, exquisitely carved in the shape of a dragon.

"The imperial dragon," he said. "Six-clawed! How could it have come there, McNeill? My servants might have been bribed, but they could not lie to me successfully, and the door to my room was locked and bolted. I had locked the shutters of my windows on the outside. I had searched my room before I went to bed. I have been all nerves lately—since yesterday. But there it was."

He went with dragging heels to a sideboard and helped himself to brandy and soda, offering some to McNeill, who, studying the scroll, refused with a shake of his head.

"Want me to read it aloud?" he asked Remsden.

"Yes."

The hesitation in his voice was like that of a prisoner about to hear a death warrant. McNeill studied over the hieroglyphs once more.

"This is a fairly exact translation," he premised.

> "Time holds the eternal balances,
> But man may weight the scales.
> A maid and a flower—both are beautiful.
> Yet, when the wind blows from the East,
> Lo, they perish as straws in the furnace!"

"The wind—from the East—from China!" groaned Remsden. "The maid, that means Helen!"

There was a real note of anguish in his voice that surprized McNeill. He had not thought that Remsden was capable of such genuine affection for the girl. He himself plainly understood the subtle threat and his jaw set hard before he took up the reading:

> "Who shall stay the hand of the Reaper?
> Only he who hath a clear conscience need not fear him.
> Yet restitution may purge the soul,
> But the path of the perverse one shall be sown with knives.
> Wo, wo unto him who mocks the ghosts of a thousand generations!
> The gods are great—and awful is their vengeance!
> They strike, and we see not whence comes the blow, nor when.
> Neither do their hearts soften to the stubborn evildoer.
> Terror shall go down with him into the Place of Shadows!"

"Well?" asked Remsden. "What do you make of it?"

"It is not time for me to talk yet," said McNeill. "I want some explanations from you. To save your stepdaughter from the fanatic priests, I took back the claw to the temple, not with any eagerness on your part, at that. I saw the claw turned over to the priest and I returned with Helen—with Miss Remsden. Now, in New York, I read that you have presented the claw to the museum and now, for the second time, you tell me that she is in jeopardy on account of it, and on account of your own infernal ambition," he added grimly.

"Now, Remsden, you concealed from me your first depredations from the temple. Don't hide anything from me this time. I warn you that if your stepdaughter's life hangs by a thread, as I believe it does, yours is still closer to annihilation."

He saw in the dilated eyes of Remsden that he, too, realized this. It was not terror for his stepdaughter as much as for himself that had shaken him. She was a pawn seized in the game whose capture left him, the king, open to attack.

"Now then," McNeill went on, "is this claw you have given the museum another, inferior specimen that somewhere you have got hold of or is it a fake that you have perpetrated after having to restore the original. And what cock-and-bull story have you foisted off on the museum concerning it? If it is so, while the princes, knowing the true claw safe and sound, have laughed at you and all America in their Oriental sleeves, you have nevertheless exposed yourself as the man who ravished their sacred shrine, and now they preshadow their revenge.

"Or, is there something deeper? Whatever it is, come clean with it. Helen, whom I love, is in danger. I am included in all likelihood. They tried to bowstring me in California. As for yourself, your death is certain unless intervention comes. And it will not be a pleasant death, Remsden, for all your vaunt of New York police protection, for all your steel bars, I am the only one who might help you, who must help you, for Helen's sake. But you must tell me the truth—the whole truth and nothing but the truth."

Remsden moistened his lips. Once more he lowered his voice to a whisper, took a long sip of the brandy and water and glanced fearfully about the room.

"It is the original," he said. "The claw in the museum, I mean."

McNeill's jaw began to protrude and his forehead to knit. Remsden hurried on:

"I'll tell you everything, McNeill. It's due you, in a way, I'll grant that. Of course you came out all right. There was no chance of a slip, and I offered you extra compensation for the risk.

"WHEN I told you in Peking that I didn't have the claw and couldn't get it for two days, it was because I had entrusted it to a Chinese jeweler for duplication. A wonderful craftsman, the only man in China, I think, who could have copied it, and you know what wonders the Orientals are at duplication. I had to pay him an enormous sum to overcome his superstitions—almost as much as I paid Fung-Ti in the first place—but he did it. He brought the two to me at the Imperial——"

"I saw the man," said McNeill shortly. "I thought you had referred it to him for an opinion. Go on."

"The facsimile was perfect. I couldn't have known them apart and I made the closest examination. I doubt if the old craftsman himself would have known the difference, once they were juggled, if I hadn't taken the precaution to impregnate the original with ambergris. The perfume sank into the jade and the claw, and some of it still clings. The copy, of course, was unscented."

He sat back with a glint of satisfaction on his features at the cleverness he had shown, but this faded at the sight of McNeill's face.

"So you deliberately sent me back to the Hoang Lung with a duplicate when Helen's life was hanging in the balance! Her honor, the prospect of horrible degradation and torture all depended on it—not to speak of my own safety or my own honor. I swore to Tao Chan that I had kept faith with him. Remsden, there are no words that I am capable of to tell you what I think of you—a man so besotted by his own puny chance for fame that he would——"

"I tell you there was no chance of a slip. The two could not be told apart."

"And what if I had been delayed upon the trip? Your master-craftsman, whose dread you thought you had bought over with your gold, was still the slave of his superstitions. We met him hurrying to Hoang Lung to confess to the trickery. I thought he was merely bearing the news of the theft and laughed at the poor fool. He was death incarnate riding to our destruction! Twenty-four hours after he had passed us Tao Chan knew what you had done.

"I wouldn't give the seed of a dried fig for your life, Remsden, for all your bars and your protection. You have deserved the death of Fung-Ti, in my estimation, you vile imitation of a pariah! If it wasn't that your dirty chicanery involved Helen I would beat you to a pulp and leave this house in the sure knowledge that, if you don't die of heart failure from cowardice, it is because the gods they write of in this script have reserved you for something more appropriate in the way of punishment."

He had risen and was towering over the crumpled Remsden, who was whining in his chair.

"Don't go back on me, McNeill! For Helen's sake! I did not dream of the jeweler's going to Hoang Lung.

"The lives of the three of us are in jeopardy. Yours is forfeit."

"There must be some way out, McNeill—some way."

"There is one chance—to make restitution of the claw. It is possible they may make terms—may keep them. I can see these two princes. They have evidently been communicated with by cable from China. For all their avowal of modern thought, they have still to play politics at home. I have reason to believe that they can be treated with."

"Yes, I think so. But I can't give them back the claw, McNeill."

"Why not?"

Remsden gulped the rest of his liquor. A stubborn look was on his face.

"Because I can't, and I won't. I've been upset a bit. That paper, and something that happened yesterday—but, —— it, this is America and bigger men than I have been safeguarded for years against greater perils. I'll—I'll go to sea, if necessary, and stay there. I have my own yacht. I'll take Helen with me. You can come along too, if you are so afraid of the vengeance of Tao Chan or whatever his name is. But I won't give it up."

Back of the man's bluster, that yet was not all bluff, for it was backed by determination, McNeill read accurately the reason for his stiffening. He would not sacrifice his own presidency, so long coveted. In all probability it had been obtained by his promise of the relic to the museum. Such arrangements were not uncommon. To take back the claw would mean his resignation, an awkward explanation, perhaps making him the laughing stock of the scientific world. Far rather would Remsden sacrifice any one near and dear to him, even run the chance of death for himself.

"I am not afraid," said McNeill. "It is quite possible that you may be able to safeguard yourself for a time, but I am going to do one thing. I am going to convince Prince Liu Chi and Prince Ten Shin of the absolute innocence of Helen and myself in this matter. After that you can do as you please. If I can't convince them I shall give out the true story of the claw."

"Ah-ha! To whom? The press? Do you think they would believe you—take the word of a penniless adventurer against Howard Remsden? I would say you were attempting to blackmail me."

"You would be very sorry if you did, Remsden," replied McNeill quietly. "Very sorry, I assure you, but there is no use wrangling. I'll see the princes. As for yourself, you seem to have changed your attitude since I arrived. It may be the brandy or perhaps your nerves react swiftly. If I can get what I deem satisfactory assurance from Liu Chi and Ten Shin as to the safety of your stepdaughter and myself, why, you can take your own measures for protection. They may be quite sufficient, if expensive. Good morning."

"Hold on a minute, McNeill. There is no good wrangling, as you say. I'm getting on a bit. Never used to know what nerves were, like you. It's indigestion; that's what it is. But you'll let me know how you come out with the princes, won't you?"

Neill reflected. It would give him a good reason for coming back—a chance to see Helen.

"You said something happened yesterday," he said. "At the meeting when you gave your address, I suppose. What was it?"

"Doubtless I exaggerated it," said Remsden.

The colossal conceit and egoism of the man had already restored him from the fright caused by the finding of the paper pinned to his counterpane. Now a shadow of fear was visible. He hesitated.

"It was awkward—unexpected," he began, "I mean the presence in New York of Liu Chi and Ten Shin. Then some of the committee asked them to be present and the press took it up. It was embarrassing. I had to change the talk I had prepared in some measure."

Remsden got fiery red under McNeill's shrewd look.

"But it went off well enough until it came to meeting the princes. I say well enough, though I had felt all through my speech that they were laughing at me—you know what I mean, McNeill, those ivory faces, motionless, the smooth lids that don't open like a white man's, they just slit apart and you see their black eyes laughing at you, like mocking devils. And, when they shook hands, it was like touching the skin of a snake!

" 'Hands across the sea,' that's what Liu Chi said, 'we are not so far apart, Mr. Remsden, after all.' That was a threat, all right—a touch of the velvet glove. Nothing of the hatchetman method about those two slick yellow devils, McNeill. And they smiled when they handled the claw. I had a wild idea that they might try to claim it. I would never have made the presentation if I had known of their presence in the country, but they just smiled with their eyes and gave it back to Forsythe, our curator, who was watching them as he does every one, even me, with the eyes of a hawk. The gift belongs to the museum and he is responsible. Every one is a possible thief in his eyes."

"I suppose," commented McNeill, "that all ancient curios may be styled stolen goods. The dead and their habitations have been ravished of jewels; temples of their carvings and inscriptions——"

"That's it exactly, Neill," broke in Remsden. "That's the point of view you must take. Science must not be judged, however, by the rules applied to the living. I do not consider myself a thief but a—a——"

"A benefactor." The sarcasm was lost.

"It was the way the prince said 'we are not so far apart,' that impressed me. They are both in it. They mean to get it. They were at the bottom of the attempted robbery last night."

"If it had been possible for the duplicated claw to get across," said McNeill, "they might have made a shift. That would have eased matters. But it would take some powerful influence to make Tao Chan let even the copy go. The shrine has worshipers and he will not let the common people know of the substitution. It would spell peril for him to be without the fetish.

"But I will let you know the result of my interview. Now, for my own business. I would like to see Miss Helen. I might tell you that those affairs of mine are no longer in the air. They are being exploited with ample capital and protection."

"I am glad to hear it, glad to hear it, I am sure. Wish you every success." Remsden touched a bell. "Tell Miss Helen that Mr. McNeill would like to see her, Jackson."

McNEILL found Helen Remsden in her own parlor. Thankful that she was not the type that required reservations, he told her frankly that there was a certain menace concerning the claw. That her stepfather had fallen in her estimation was evident. She had thought the present he had made to the museum was merely a clever substitution and, though she said nothing as to the risk to which they had been exposed at the Hoang Lung temple, her manner conveyed her opinion of the man who had prompted it.

"I think I can remove the menace," said McNeill, "but your father——"

"My stepfather," she corrected pointedly.

"Your stepfather must be made to return the claw."

"He will not do that," she affirmed. "He would have to degrade himself in his own light. The museum would have to acknowledge having been deceived. He would lose his presidency."

"I think there may be a way out," said McNeill. "I am to come again tomorrow. Shall I see you?"

"Certainly. I shall be glad."

McNeill went off happily, but he had all his wits about him and he did not fail to see a man, who had been lounging at the corner, slouchingly follow. Neill had dismissed his taxi and now he swung into the park. His shadow persisted and McNeill led him on at a smart pace, turning a corner abruptly and hiding behind some shrubbery. He saw the man go by and saw also, stamped on his skull-like face, the evidence of opium.

"I shall have an interesting interview with our Oriental potentates, I fancy," he told himself as he caught a bus to return to his hotel.

His room was made up. Pinned to the pillow-sham was a gold dragon, six-clawed, made into a stick pin. McNeill shrugged his shoulders.

"Nothing small about their methods," he said aloud, then deliberately removed the pearl from the scarf and replaced it with the emblem of the dragon-king.

CHAPTER VIII

THE HAND OF STEEL

THE suites allotted to Princes Liu Chi and Ten Shin were costly according to their capaciousness, running the full length of one corridor of the famous New York hostelry. A private elevator was part of the equipment and to this McNeill, having arranged his appointment, was ushered by the urbane secretary of the imperial entourage that, despite their affectation of democracy, still retained the attributes of Chinese aristocracy and accompanying wealth.

A Chinese boy was elevator pilot and, once on the floor of the suite, America gave place to the Flowery Kingdom. There was no suggestion of anything Occidental, save in the electric fixtures, disguised beneath oiled-silk lanterns, and the telephones. Either brought with them, or secured from New York Oriental merchants, the furniture, the rugs, the hangings—every detail were those of an imperial apartment in the Forbidden City.

The secretary, in American clothes, disappeared in the ante-chamber and presently a giant Chinaman, whose silken garb bore the insignia of the royal house, ushered McNeill into a room where Liu Chi and Ten Shin, arrayed in magnificent brocades, rose to meet him and bade him be seated upon a lounge tapestried with sprawling dragons.

McNeill still wore the dragon pin, dressed as he was for the morning appointment, and a compact automatic was ready to his hand. It would not be hard to dispose of him, he reflected, if he gave them the chance. He had come up in a private elevator. No one would know when he went down, if he ever did, save a Chinaman. His body could be smuggled out in some trunk and got rid of quietly. McNeill was not morbid about this possibility. It was quite on the cards and he prepared for it as best he could.

"I expect an important call in some fifteen minutes," he said after the due ceremonial of greeting had been gone through. "Would it be too much if it was transmitted to me here?"

Liu Chi smiled and gave orders in his own language to that effect.

"To what do we owe the pleasure of this visit, Mr. McNeill? We have heard that you have visited our country, have, in fact, lived there for several years. That is interesting. You will realize, for one thing, the difficulty of assimilation that besets a land like ours in taking up Occidental thought and ideas, when my countrymen are so steeped with ignorance and superstition. But we must do the best we can."

The idea of these two imperious beings, bred of a thousand years of despotic measure, being seriously inclined to simplicity of any sort that bespoke equality, struck McNeill as absurd. It would take many generations for China to become a true republic. Liu Chi and Ten Shin were merely going with the current and taking good care of themselves meanwhile. He decided to match Oriental guile with Yankee-Irish bluntness of attack.

"I have come here to tell you a straight tale," he commenced and recited, omitting no detail, the history of the claw from the time he had first met Remsden and, attracted by Helen, agreed to act as guide and interpreter. Through it all the two princes sat like statues, immutable, their eyes only shown by narrow bars of glittering jet between their narrowed lids. So did the imperial mandarins sit in justice. At the close Ten Shin started to exchange a few words with his cousin, but McNeill interrupted:

"I understand the Mandarin dialect," he said.

Ten Shin and Liu Chi gravely nodded an acknowledgment.

"That is very honorable of you," said the latter. "And honor does not dwell in unclean places."

But, for all their politeness, McNeill believed the thing had been a test. Anyway he had scored.

"Your tale is well told," said Liu Chi. "Yet we can not think why you should think us especially interested. The museums of England, of France, of all countries hold relics of past races. Our own country has long been overrun by conquerors; it is the most polyglot of nations, of mixed blood, mixed faiths. 'The old order changeth, yielding place to new,' as Tennyson writes. And we, my cousin and myself, are of the new order.

"We can not hold any responsibility for Mr. Remsden's emotions. The Hoang Lung is a far-reaching organization, linked by mysticism as it is. It is possible that some of their members may have attempted to threaten Mr. Remsden and play upon his fears, but, of a surety, we do not wish the claw. We were curious to see it, yes, but there our interest ceases. We came here for things concerning this generation and those to come, Mr. McNeill, long before Mr. Remsden visited the temple of Hoang Lung. You must be aware of that.

"You seem to make it very plain that neither Miss Remsden nor yourself were implicated in this matter or in the substitution. I sincerely trust that, if any members of the Hoang Lung are in doubt as to this, they may be convinced before they carry out any threats, if they so intend."

McNeill, listening to the smooth syllables, with all the difficult r's sounded perfectly, knew that Liu Chi was lying, but he could do nothing. They also thought that he had lied concerning the innocence of Helen and himself in the affair, or they did not care. Ten Shin took up the talk.

"We can not pretend to influence such of our countrymen who may still cling to superstition," he said. "We have deliberately severed ourselves from such. We shall hope, of course, to teach them better in time. We are sorry we can do nothing for you, glad to have listened to you. We would suggest that, for Mr. Remsden's peace of mind, he might open up negotiations for the return or exchange of the claw, speaking merely as those having knowledge of the workings of the Chinese trend of thought. One unfortunate national characteristic of ours is revenge, particularly when allied to faiths, however loosely founded.

"You evidently, from the style of the communication conveyed to Mr. Remsden, have to do with a clever mentality. I would suggest that any reprisal that might be intended would be divided into two parts—punishment and insistence upon the return of the true relic. As long as Mr. Remsden seems the key, the only key to that return, so long will he be safe from punishment. As to the reference to Miss Remsden, speaking again from the general understanding of my more bigoted and ignorant countrymen, I fear, I greatly fear that, even if we could interfere, it would be too late."

"Just exactly what do you mean?" asked McNeill.

The absolutely unemotional, even pronunciation, like drops of water falling on the bar of a xylophone, the mask-like faces, the atmosphere of the room with its dim lights, masked windows, a hint of incense, had gradually chilled him. These men were pitiless.

"Mr. Remsden was warned yesterday."

Then Helen had been already struck in some mysterious way. McNeill's fingers gripped his automatic. His muscles tensed.

A telephone sounded.

"Your call, I think, Mr. McNeill."

He had asked Helen to call him, partly to assure her that he was working in her interests, partly as a bluff to the princes. His spirit lightened as he heard her voice.

"And I suppose I have you to thank for

the magnificent roses," she was saying. "You mustn't be so extravagant."

"It was not I," he answered. "But I'll see you this afternoon."

He hung up the receiver in relief. He was certain that the two princes were watching him covertly, as cats might watch a mouse. But Helen was safe, despite their covert threats.

Again he tried the direct method.

"If I succeed in getting Mr. Remsden to relinquish the claw," he said, "could I count upon your influence to have the news transmitted to those most interested—to Tao Chan for example?"

"You may be assured, Mr. McNeill, that we will do all that we can. For your own warning, if you so regard the pin you found on your pillow, we can hardly better recommend you than to the wonderful protective methods of your great city, many of which we hope to ultimately adopt or adapt. Before we leave we hope to give a banquet to those with whom we have come in close contact. May I hope that you will be present?"

DISMISSED, down in the private elevator and back into America again, McNeill went chagrined to his own room. He knew that he had failed, that he had touched only the shell of the consciousness of the princes. Not one shade of doubt, of surprize, of anger or pity, not one atom of any emotion had they shown. He might as well have spoken to the lacquered images in the temple at Hoang Lung. But from that minute he would watch the safety of Helen. She must be made to understand her danger. The infinite sarcasm of his reception burned within him. He had been as impotent as a small boy blowing bubbles at the feet of the great statue of Buddha at Laiting.

He was before his time at the Remsden residence, but Helen was expecting him. The roses she had spoken of were in a tall vase of metal—gorgeous American Beauty roses several feet tall.

"The most exquisite, royal things," she said. "And the thorniest! But you have to pay for them by the length of the stem, I understand. I thought they were from you and I was going to scold you for the pricks I got in arranging them."

"I wish I had thought of them," said McNeill regretfully. "And I am very sorry for the damaged fingers. Was there no card with them?"

"No. I looked carefully. But they came from your hotel."

McNeill looked thoughtful for a moment.

"I have promised to see your father before I go," he said. "I failed to convince the princes. They pleaded lack of interest and, in almost the same breath, emphasized the threat. You have got to be careful of your comings and goings, Helen. Promise me that you will?"

She noted his first free use of her name as she blushed and then answered:

"Very well, Neill, what do you suggest?"

CHAPTER IX

THE WHITE DEATH

THE next day the princes went to Washington by invitation to see the sights of the Capital City. Their suite was still reserved, but McNeill breathed a little more easily. The menace hanging over Helen seemed less imminent though he could neither dismiss nor fathom the suggestion of Ten Shin that it had already fallen, and it had been an assertion rather than a suggestion. But the days went by and she appeared as blooming as ever, while Remsden himself completely regained his poise.

No national president was better safeguarded than was he night and day; the protection extending to his stepdaughter. He no longer affected to hold McNeill at a distance. The Irishman's polite covering of the contempt in which he held Remsden may have enraged him, but it also forced him to at least an equal politeness, as a lion will go through tricks it hates from fear of the tamer and his whip.

There were few allusions to the claw. Twice McNeill urged Remsden to do something toward the restoration of the claw, to communicate with the princes at their hotel in Washington, but, confident in the power of his little army of protectors, he stubbornly refused to discuss the question.

It was a week after the departure of Liu Chi and his cousin that Helen made a complaint that struck fear into the heart of McNeill, ever alert for danger against the girl he loved and, who, he had reason to believe, returned his love. In the shadow that he still feared hung over them all, he had not spoken to her openly, but there were a hundred signs that cheer even despairing lovers, and McNeill was far from being despondent.

He had definitely made up his mind to force Remsden's hand upon the princes' return, scheduled for the tenth day after they left for Washington. Their banquet had been set for the following evening and all New York, especially that part of its social center that had not been invited, was agog over the rumored extravagance of the affair.

It was to be an Arabian Nights entertainment, it was said. There would be magic wrought in more ways than one, and all the fabled magnificence of Aladdin's gardens would fade before the spectacle of the feast to be spread in the private suite of their imperial highnesses as the society columns, still secretly delighting in titles, styled these two Chinamen who claimed to be representatives of a new republic. Guests had been asked to attend in Oriental garb, and all the glamour of a fancy-dress affair fascinated the fashion-writers and stimulated the curiosity and envy of those not fortunate enough to receive invitations.

Remsden, rather in fear than bravado, McNeill thought, had accepted for himself and Helen, and Neill himself had likewise signified his intention of being present. Helen and he were discussing costumes when she presented her finger for his inspection.

"It is numb, Neill," she said. "First it was the upper joint and now it is the second—the same finger I pricked so badly with those roses I thought you sent me. I can't bend it between those two joints at all. Look at it."

As McNeill took the tapering finger a strange fear gripped his heart. The mention of the roses seemed to have promoted the presentiment. Helen's hand was white, well kept, the texture of a gardenia petal, though the tips showed the faint rose-hue of perfect health. The index finger of the right hand was the one she complained about, and McNeill noticed that it was subtly different from the rest.

He could bend it between the first and second joints but there was no reflex action. The nail lacked color and the pinkness of the tip was entirely missing. The flesh was unshriveled, but it had a frozen look; it was like a finger carved in alabaster, a finger of Galatea with all the rest of the beautiful statue come to life.

A tiny, light-brown speck marked where the sharp thorns of the American beauties had punctured the skin and drawn blood. There was a smaller mark lower down, made in the same way. He strove to hide his premonition. He dared not gaze into her face, though presently he would have to force himself to that inspection, he knew quite well.

"How long have you noticed this?" he asked.

"Since the morning after the thorns pricked me," she answered. "I thought nothing of it, but it has steadily grown worse. I asked Dr. Hastings about it and he thought there might be some slight local infection, but it has not swelled; it has simply lost all sensation. He didn't seem to consider it very serious. It is my sewing finger, and I do sew occasionally," she laughed, "so I have noticed it."

"By the way," asked McNeill casually, though he made a strong effort to control his voice, "you never found out who sent you those roses?"

"No—no one has claimed the honor. You are quite sure you didn't leave a standing order, Neill? It would be like you."

"Quite sure. I wouldn't worry about this if I were you. It will probably pass."

"Oh, I won't worry about it. It is probably a matter of circulation. I'll have to be more careful of my diet and cut off candy I suppose."

Neill laughed with her and then, deliberately forcing back all emotion, he proceeded to the test he dreaded.

"Won't you play something?" he asked, steadying his voice.

She went over to the piano and Neill made a point of choosing something that she must play by note. To aid her in this he turned on the piano lights and then settled himself in a chair that gave him a good view of her face, turning it, as she did occasionally, toward him. To the ordinary observer there would have seemed nothing out of the ordinary, save that the face was very fair to look upon with its perfect oval, the scarlet lips and the steady, large eyes beneath curving, delicately penciled brows. It was at these latter that Neill directed his closest attention, though he managed to hide it from her, smiling when he met her gaze.

WHEN he left her that night, his nails had cut deeply into his palms.

"The cowards!" he said. "The curs! And there is no remedy!"

At the hotel he made discreet inquiries at the flower stand—inquiries sped by a jovial talk and augmented with a liberal tip. He traced the flowers. There had been no special attempt to hide their source, save from the lack of a card—a matter easily explained by blaming an underling secretary who would shoulder the responsibility in case of inquiry. They had been ordered by the secretary of the two Chinese princes. A not too unusual compliment from the distinguished foreigners to the daughter of the president of the museum whose *soirée* they had attended, and who had been placed on the list of guests at their banquet.

The flowers and their deadly thorns had faded and long since been cast away, not to be recovered.

But they had accomplished their purpose. Achieved the deadly end of the fiends who had sent them. How had the Chinese scribe written?

> A maid and a flower—both are beautiful.
> Yet, when the wind blows from the East,
> Lo, they perish as straws in the furnace!

The wind had blown from the East. Helen was doomed. Doomed with the living death, the White Death of China—leprosy!

McNeill had suspected it in the numbing, thorn-pricked finger, had confirmed it in the slight but unmistakable leonine cast of her brows, a suggestion of furrows and puffed flesh that is one of the symptoms of the disease. Leprosy was infectious and the thorns had been impregnated by the deadly virus. The evidence was destroyed, but the girl was sentenced to a loathsome, ever encroaching dissolution, from which there was no cure. Only a horrible segregation under the law.

Black murder welled up in McNeill, but he forced it down. Remsden was the one to blame primarily and he, too, would be hard hit, for Neill felt that he loved his stepdaughter. As for the Orientals, they had been hit and they had struck back according to their lights. And Helen? His clear brain reeled for a few moments as he contemplated the awful fate ahead of her—a fate that he determined to share as nearly as he would be allowed. Yet there must be, should be, a reckoning. First doctors must be privately consulted, Helen must be persuaded to see them on some pretext, the stiffening of her finger, the lack of circulation, but she must not be allowed to suspect. It would drive a girl of her vitality, her love of life, her sensitiveness, insane.

For himself he could only determine one course. He could bluff up some evidence, confront the princes. To what definite avail he knew not but he must find some vent for his own overmastering fury at the unfair blow. And Remsden should not be spared. His selfish pride should be humiliated. The claw should be returned. Perhaps——

CHAPTER X

McNEILL

McNEILL had gone up in the private elevator by sheer force of arms. Hiding behind portières, he had seized the moment when a visitor descended from the suites of Liu Chi and Ten Shin on the night of their coming back from Washington, waited until the man had disappeared and the Chinese operator lounged waiting for a call, and then he had come out, shoved the muzzle of his gun against the Chinaman's blouse and ordered him to ascend.

The secretary met him at the top and to him McNeill applied the same treatment. His lean face, bossed with muscles from his set jaws, aided the imagination of the secretary, who walked before him, death joggling his ribs, into the anteroom and so into the reception room where the two princes sat. This time they were in conventional evening dress, their faces strangely incongruous in the setting.

McNeill faced them with a crisp demand for an audience.

"Certainly," assented Liu Chi with the briefest glance at his cousin. "But there was, there is no need for violence, Mr. McNeill. You can put that pistol away. We are quite adequately protected."

"That is where you are mistaken," said Neill McNeill. "I do not represent violence, only force, and that is quite necessary. And I am amply backed. I do not give a poppy petal for my own life at the present moment," he went on, speaking in the

Mandarin dialect, "save as it may accomplish an end and, if it is wiped out, there are others who possess the actual evidence I am about to present to you."

Again there was that hint of a look, the swift shuttling of agate eyes, but the princes said nothing.

"I do not know how intimate you have become with the workings of American justice—" Neill went on, his voice as cold as ever theirs had sounded—"the justice that you spoke of adapting to your own new republic. But there is such a thing as international law and you have made the mistake of supposing Mr. Remsden to be purely a private citizen without influence at Washington. You can easily assure yourselves of this mistake by discussion with your embassy, I am very certain. He has a great deal of power.

"You affect to disdain the matter of the claw in your affectation of new Chinese policies which you are forced to adopt by the trend of the times in China. You are particularly anxious, not merely to remain upon good terms with the United States and her allies, but also to negotiate a loan of considerable magnitude. This has not been made public and my knowledge of it should show you that I have not been idle and that Mr. Remsden, from whom I obtained the information, is in touch with international affairs.

"You sent some roses to Miss Remsden. I have the full evidence. You will be held responsible for the actions of your secretary, despite any denial he may make. The thorns were impregnated with the virus of leprosy, which was communicated to Miss Remsden, as you hoped, by the pricking of her hand. Those thorns have been subjected to analysis, not thrown away, as you expected. I know the symptoms of leprosy.

"To that and the fact that the virus was so strong as to bring out swiftly those symptoms, is due the fact that the roses were rescued in time. Your rank may keep you from imprisonment, but your failure to make the loan, the general loathing and suspicion that will be cast upon all Chinese diplomacy and personality will not serve to make you popular with your government. The evidence is in the hands of our Secret Service, or will be turned over to them either upon my order or in case I do not leave these rooms unscathed or am in any way interfered with. I have spoken."

McNeill stopped talking, unable to tell from those impassive masks what effect his powerful indictment had made. It was largely bluff. Remsden did have influence and the wires had been busy ever since he had disclosed to Remsden the state of his daughter's health. But they had been unable to recover the roses. Still the cards were hidden and the stakes were big.

"We will converse in English," answered Ten Shin imperturbably. "You have delivered your tirade, Mr. McNeill. If such a misfortune has overtaken Miss Remsden, we can understand your feelings and those of her father, powerless as we may be to avert them."

"Remsden is not her father," said McNeill. "No blood of his is in her veins and she is innocent of any complicity in his affairs."

"She is not his own daughter?"

"No."

There was silence for several moments. The two princes seemed to be, in some occult way, transferring thoughts.

"You play a good game, Mr. McNeill," said Liu Chi at last. "And you place your cards on the table, but they are not face up, and some of them may be spurious. I may say, without prejudice to our own disclaimer in this matter, that the question of Chinese vengeance lies largely in the permanent punishment of offenders, even to the third and fourth generation. The fact that Miss Remsden is not of Howard Remsden's own blood is, I should imagine, quite a factor. It is a pity it was not known before—to Tao Chan, for example.

"As for your threats against us, we will dismiss them as quite natural under the circumstances. It is true that China is anxious, through all her representatives, to stand well with America; to prove to your people that we are not utter barbarians, that we can even look at things from the same standpoint of humanity, the principles upon which your country is so deeply founded.

"If you, with Mr. Remsden and Miss Remsden, will attend the banquet tomorrow evening—twenty-four hours will not alter the medical situation—we may be able to assist you. We shall expect Mr. Remsden to come half-way. We accept no responsibility in this. We act merely as mediators. We can understand that Mr.

Remsden wishes to, as we say in China, save his face. We can perhaps arrange that also.

"You will convey our sentiments to Mr. Remsden. For yourself: Chinese doctors have long been held up to the ridicule of the western pharmacopœia as believers in charms, users of strange ingredients such as those mentioned by the witches in 'Macbeth.' There may be merit in these things. All diseases of the body are not cured in the body. We are expecting a notable guest. With us he holds great merit as a herbalist though that is not his profession. You shall meet him. And remember—for every virus there is a serum—not always generally known as yet, but we Orientals have our secrets. We can not prolong this interview. We have an appointment."

He clapped his hands and the secretary appeared.

"Show in the gentlemen," ordered Liu Chi.

McNeill, hope affecting him like a palsy, found himself acknowledging introductions to several Americans, some of whom he thought he knew. Soon he found himself on the ground floor, his hope growing. Could it be that the Chinese had found a cure for leprosy?

CHAPTER XI

THE FORTUNE TELLER

THE banquet that was to be the talk of New York for many a day had progressed with wonderful *éclat*. The costumes of the guests, the elaborately bizarre decorations, the strange music, the unusual dishes spiced with a bountiful supply of occidental vintages, the courtesy of the hosts, the exotic atmosphere—all had made the affair a success from the start. Rare souvenirs, not to be priced, had augmented the *entente cordiale*.

With the cessation of gastronomics came an entertainment of wizardry, of parlor acrobatics, of indoor fireworks, until the bewildered beholders were brought to the tiring point.

Then, at the sound of a gong, a booth was brought in—a hooded tent of silken brocades, and Ten Shin arose.

"Much of which you have so courteously shared with us tonight," he said, "belongs to the past—the passing China soon, we hope, to be revivified with lessons learned from American ingenuity and advancement. But there is one element that always appeals, particularly to the fair sex. That element is the future. A member of our little embassy has arrived today from China, bringing important matters and, while he has been too fatigued from his long and accelerated journey to join us, he has consented to give some manifestation of his skill as a diviner."

There was a murmur of anticipatory delight and again the gong sounded. From behind high curtains four Chinamen, dressed in vivid emerald silk, brought forward a palanquin of brightest scarlet lacquer on which were illuminated golden dragons in raised and lustrous metal work. Six-clawed they were, noted McNeill, tense with the sense of something pregnant. This they placed by the tent and disappeared.

A weird chant, high pitched, nerve thrilling, came from unseen musicians, the shrill piping of the Chinese clarionet and the twang of the *gekken*. The room was very quiet and the lights grew gradually dim. Then the scarlet curtains of the palanquin glowed fiery red, faint streaks of light appeared through the folds of the tent and a figure emerged from the carriage. It was clad in silk of the vividest yellow and the robes, McNeill noticed, as his fingers gripped those of Helen next to him, were of priestly cut. The figure was squat. In its rotundity it might have been ludicrous, save for a certain dignity that emanated from it and because of that of the two princely hosts. The face, projecting from the folds of the hood, was that of a turtle—was that of Tao Chan, high-priest of the Hoang Lung.

McNeill was not surprized. But he marked the effort Helen made to suppress her feelings of astonishment and, perhaps, of terror, though there was, as he assured her, no fear of anything out of the way happening there with so many American guests present. Yet there was something that thrilled him with a sense of hidden power—of mystery. He glanced at Remsden. Remsden was staring at Tao Chan as he might have looked at a basilisk, his eyes projecting, his lower jaw sagging.

Tao Chan had evidently arrived with the duplicate, leaving some excuse, or perhaps a second replica, behind him. This one was to be exchanged for the original. Everybody's face was to be saved. Helen, by Chinese drugs, to be cured, Remsden to be left as president, and relieved of his Damoclean fate. Only the museum would suffer and be none the worse for it, thought McNeill, knowing other spurious objects venerated there as real.

He, Neill McNeill, had brought this about by taking advantage of China's position as the Sick Man of Asia, looking to America for aid. The princes had come with a dual purpose—to get the claw and to establish friendly relations. Which cause they held the greater McNeill did not venture to imagine. He did not care, feeling certain that the evening would see the end of their troubles unless Remsden proved obstinate. In this case McNeill promised himself that he would devise a little pressure on his own account.

Ten Shin turned to the lady on his right.

"Would you read the future?" he asked her. "I am sure that for you it will be rosy."

Tao Chan had entered the little tent and taken his seat before a stand of dark wood, the legs formed of writhing dragons. There was a dish in front of him.

"You will not be spirited away, I assure you," went on the prince. "I will not guarantee that you will not be enchanted, but turn about is fair play."

The guest laughed nervously at his raillery but consented to enter the tent. The curtains closed and there was only a low murmur to be heard, drowned largely by the rising notes of the orchestra. In less than two minutes the woman came out.

"Your wizard is a flatterer, prince," she said. "I wish I could believe half he promised, though he does not speak very good English."

"He has learned it for the occasion," said Ten Shin gravely.

Liu Chi next asked his dinner partner and she disappeared. McNeill could hear the first visitant answering questions.

"I can't describe it," she replied. "Wait till your turn. He showed me a funny plate first and then—I don't remember really what happened. It was all over so quickly, but he told me a lot of strange things that might come true. I hope so."

"Chinese hypnotism," whispered McNeill to Helen under cover of the chatter. "He read her own wishes. It will be your turn next. Don't be afraid. It is going to help us. I can guess what they are after."

At Liu Chi's request Helen went into the booth, remaining there a little longer than the rest. When she came out she was pale, and McNeill handed her a glass of wine.

"Don't talk now," he said. "Tell us later."

She nodded brightly at him.

"It sounded like good news," she said.

Some of the fairer guests refused; others accepted and the novelty began to wane. Tao Chan pleaded, or pretended to plead, exhaustion, and withdrew in the palanquin. Then the lights went up. Ten Shin arose with a toast to the United States and another orchestra, typically American, broke spiritedly into the "Star Spangled Banner." The brilliant assemblage rose. As the strains died, Liu Chi made his peroration.

"Heliogabalus," he said, "smothered his guests to death with rose petals. Tonight it is my cousin and myself who are smothered with your good-will, but not to death. And, though roses grow in China, we have a more typical flower that bears the charm of sweet forgetfulness—the faculty of dreamless sleep. The lotus! May its petals bring to all of you that boon to end the night."

The canopy above the table divided and a shower of fragrant blossoms fell while all the room was filled with mystical perfume. Laughing, congratulating, the guests departed, the princes standing to bid them farewell.

"We shall see you once more before we leave, I hope," said Ten Shin to McNeill and Helen. Then as they passed on he touched Remsden on the arm.

"A word with you, sir," he said pleasantly, and envious guests marked Remsden as one given special favors.

◆

THE two waited for Remsden in the anteroom. He came to them at last with the face of one who has seen his own ghost—his features twisted like a man who has suffered a stroke. All the way back to the limousine he did not speak but plucked clumsily at his own fingers. At the house he achieved speech with an effort, as if his lingual muscles had suffered paralysis.

"Neill and I will join you when you have taken off your wraps, Helen," he said.

She looked anxiously at him and then nodded.

"In the drawing-room," she replied.

The men went into the library. Remsden poured brandy and gulped it down. Then he sank into the cushions of a big chair like a man of ninety.

"What is the matter with Helen, Neill?" he asked thickly.

"Leprosy," answered McNeill bluntly. Remsden clawed at the arms of the chair, gasping for breath and speech.

"My God!" he said. "I never thought—Ten Shin said—he said that—as a bruised plum is to a rotten fruit, as a stained pearl to a bowl of slime, so should my punishment be compared to hers. Oh, my God, Neill!"

"Brace up," snapped McNeill. "What else did he say? About the claw?"

"I am to show it him at the museum tomorrow—Tao Chan I mean. He is to handle it. The princes will be there. We—we may adjust matters. I do not know. I can not trust them. I must see Helen."

McNeill guessed what the adjustment would be. A little legerdemain, such as Wilson had shown in the desert, this time with Tao Chan as the prestidigitator. But had Remsden already been inoculated? How was he to be cured? And Helen?

"There are various degrees of leprosy, of course," he said. "Do you fancy that you are already infected?"

Remsden nodded.

"I know it," he groaned. "Something pricked my palm when I shook hands with Ten Shin, and he smiled when I started. But Helen—Helen has an antidote. I shall receive one tomorrow after——"

"The claws are exchanged," supplied McNeill. "Let us go into the drawing-room."

They found the girl waiting and McNeill, answering a plea in Remsden's eyes, put the question to her:

"What happened in the tent? I can imagine that Tao Chan hypnotized you and questioned you. By so doing he could confirm my statement to the princes of your innocence in the stealing and substitution of the claw. But what did he say that you remember?"

"Why he told me that I had been suffering from some trouble with my hands but that I should soon be entirely well again. He gave me this."

She showed a tiny phial of gray jade wonderfully carven in the shape of a dragon and stoppered with a dragon's claw of gold that held a tiny ball of crystal. Within were some pellets of dull orange color.

"These are to be taken one every hour," she said, "dissolved in hot water. I have already taken one and I can feel a tingling in my numb finger."

She held it out for inspection. Remsden looked at it with a shudder.

"And he said that Mr. Remsden was in danger of sickness that was to be averted by the medicine that he, Tao Chan, would give him tomorrow. Are you to see him tomorrow?"

"Yes," answered Remsden. "Thank God I am. Good night, you two. Good night."

They watched him leave the room, feeble, bowed, a man old before his time.

Then youth turned to youth.

THE CAMP-FIRE

A Meeting-Place for Readers Writers and Adventurers

Our Camp-Fire came into being May 5, 1912, with our June issue, and since then its fire has never died down. Many have gathered about it and they are of all classes and degrees, high and low, rich and poor, adventurers and stay-at-homes, and from all parts of the earth. Some whose voices we used to know have taken the Long Trail and are heard no more, but they are still memories among us, and new voices are heard, and welcomed.

We are drawn together by a common liking for the strong, clean things of out-of-doors, for word from the earth's far places, for man in action instead of caged by circumstance. The *spirit* of adventure lives in all men; the rest is chance.

But something besides a common interest holds us together. Somehow a real comradeship has grown up among us. Men can not thus meet and talk together without growing into friendlier relations; many a time does one of us come to the rest for facts and guidance; many a close personal friendship has our Camp-Fire built up between two men who had never met; often has it proved an open sesame between strangers in a far land.

Perhaps our Camp-Fire is even a little more. Perhaps it is a bit of leaven working gently among those of different station toward the fuller and more human understanding and sympathy that will some day bring to man the real democracy and brotherhood he seeks. Few indeed are the agencies that bring together on a friendly footing so many and such great extremes as here. And we are numbered by the hundred thousand now.

If you are come to our Camp-Fire for the first time and find you like the things we like, join us and find yourself very welcome. There is no obligation except ordinary manliness, no forms or ceremonies, no dues, no officers, no anything except men and women gathered for interest and friendliness. Your desire to join makes you a member.

SOME more testimony concerning the Custer Massacre, from a comrade who was formerly of the 7th Infantry, which barely missed being in the fight itself.

What Dr. Arnold said about Buffalo Bill was mild enough in tone but, well, takes the general point of view that to a certain degree Buffalo Bill's fame was due, as "Uncle Frank" Huston has put it, to press-agenting. Of course he was press-agented; even his best friends must admit that. But whether it was to a degree that really affected the validity of his claim to fame is another matter and I don't believe we want to start another Drannan discussion at Camp-Fire.

Elyria, Ohio.

I have just been reading about Custer, Buffalo Bill and Calamity Jane. There has been so much bunk written and told concerning Custer, Reno, Buffalo Bill, etc., that I thought it might be that you would like to read a more truthful account concerning those men.

My regiment, the 7th U. S. Infantry, was ordered into the fight where Custer fell, but the order being countermanded, the 7th Cavalry, Custer's command, was ordered into the fight while the 7th Infantry were detailed to guard the wagon-train. Reno was not to blame for the massacre of Custer and his men, for Reno obeyed Custer's orders as well as he could under the circumstances, while Custer, disobeying his own orders, caused the deaths of himself and his men. Custer had been warned for days before that the Indians were out in very great numbers, but, paying no attention to his scouts, he ordered Reno to go down the Little Big Horn always, cross over, and, after circling around to the back of the Indians' camp, to fire a signal shot, upon which Custer and his men were to charge upon the camp from the front. Custer, however, bull-headed as ever, never waited for Reno to get back of the camp and fire the signal shot, but dashed right in, when, as Chief Gall said when showing a party over the field in 1886, the Indians were as thick as the leaves of the forest, springing up from the ground and in lots of instances clubbing the cavalrymen off from their horses.

CUSTER went into the fight with long hair, all stories to the contrary, and it is no doubt all bosh about his having committed suicide. He was certainly killed by either Rain-in-the-Face or some other Indian. It was a massacre, all right, for their carbines were mostly fastened to their saddles and, their horses breaking away, they were left with only a few carbines, about a half dozen sabers and their revolvers with which to defend themselves.

In the meantime Reno and his men were surrounded on a hill by Indians, and the 7th Infantry and a small outfit of cavalry, the 8th, if I remember right, rescued Reno and his men. Afterward the 7th Infantry and the 8th Cavalry helped to bury Custer and his men. Reno would have been wiped out with his men if they had not been rescued just in time.

BUFFALO BILL used to scout with my regiment and . . . I used to know Calamity Jane. Calamity Jane was certainly a very noted woman. She was full of life and vigor, and when she looked at a person her eyes would almost bore holes through them.—Dr. William E. Arnold (formerly Musician, Co. B, 7th Infantry, U. S. A.)

A WORD from Harold A. Lamb in connection with his story in this issue:

New York.

A few points about "Said Afzel's Elephant." It may seem improbable that three men could do what Abdul Dost and his friends tackled. In India at that time, however, a noble from the court traveled with a large following of slaves, personal attendants, eunuchs, wives, buffoons, *hafiz*, or poem-readers, bearers, etc.

FEW of such gentry were fighting men by inclination or training. And even today the hillmen of Afghanistan such as the Afridis are excellent combatants when so inclined. At that time tribal warfare was the rule and the hillmen were skilled in weapons. They had to be.

As to Said Afzel. The character of the opium-using poet is not overdrawn. Drugs of varied sort were in general use, and it was the fashion to remain stupefied for certain lengths of time. The Rajputs were addicted to opium in very large quantities. One passage in the memoirs of Baber relates that he kept sober at a drinking party of his friends in order to see what the bout would be like. He watched them drink wine, then change to *bhang* and distilled spirits, ending up with opium and more wine until "they became senseless or began to commit all manner of follies, whereupon I had myself carried out."

A GOOD deal has been written of the treasure of the Moghuls. This was hardly so very great in money, but consisted of enormous quantities of jewels, especially diamonds and rubies, horses, cloth-of-gold, etc. The amount of an amir's treasure measured the number of fighting-men he could buy; hence the possession of a store of riches as in this story was more valuable to an ambitious noble than a small kingdom.—H. A. Lamb.

THANKS to our comrade Ira A. Thompson of El Paso I have a copy of "Poisonous Animals of the Desert," by Charles T. Vorhies, which is Bulletin No. 83 of the Agricultural Experiment Station, College of Agriculture, University of Arizona, Tucson, Arizona. The Bulletins, Timely Hints and Reports of this Station will be sent free to all who apply. Among other things, it seems to give us a final and authoritative decision on our old, old friend, the Gila Monster. It *is* poisonous, but the effects of its bite are variable and there seems to be no established case of the death of a human being from its bite.

Here is Mr. Thompson's letter:

El Paso, Texas.

In your issue of August 18th you list 13 kinds of rattlesnakes.

As Arizona is the home of 11 kinds, I take the liberty to send you this booklet issued by Arizona State University, which states there are 19 known varieties of rattlesnakes, 14 of which inhabit U. S. A. and 11 of these are found in Arizona. My .45 Colt (single-action, if you please) has finished many a rattler.

Re coral snake. A Mexican woman at a mine about 60 miles south of the line lived about 10 or 15 minutes after being bitten by coral snake.

You will also find something about Mr. Gila Monster. Nothing like the bunk one sometimes reads in stories, nor for that matter is it much like the stuff I have handed out to entertain some of the new comers, who as a rule will believe the lies but not the truth.—Ira A. Thompson.

And here is a quotation from the Bulletin:

Just one other poisonous reptile belongs to our fauna—the Gila Monster (Heloderma suspectum, cover cut). This and a closely related species, Heloderma horridum, found only in Mexico, are the only poisonous lizards in the world. Absolutely no other lizards (these including the so-called "horned toads") are poisonous. The Gila Monster has poison-glands, but in the lower instead of the upper jaw, the secretion oozing out between the teeth and the lower lips. It has no poison fangs however, and therefore no definite mechanism for forcibly injecting poison with a stroke as does the rattlesnake. It will snap and bite if irritated, and will cling like a bulldog when it gets hold, and poison may enter the wounds made by its numerous small sharp teeth as a result of the tenacious grip of the animal.

THE effects of its bite are variable, owing doubtless to the imperfect application of the venomous saliva. Though some reports have it that human deaths have resulted from the bite of this animal, these reports are but hearsay and fade away to nothing upon investigation. The writer is indebted to a reputable physician of Tucson who has made considerable effort to authenticate a single case of death caused by the Gila Monster, and has failed to do so. An exhaustive report on "The Venom of Heloderma," by Leo Loeb, published by the Carnegie Institution, as well as the researches of other investigators, shows that the venom produces fatal results in various small animals, such as rats, mice, frogs, guinea pigs, etc. As to effects on man, we find no local data to discountenance the following statement from Loeb's report:

"NO DEATH of a human being has come to our knowledge that can be attributed to the bite of a Gila Monster. A bite from this animal is in man either followed by no symptoms at all or by a local swelling, perhaps extending to the shoulder, if the bite affected the upper extremity. In all the reports concerning the local effect of the bite of the Heloderma in man, mention is made of the rapid appearance of swelling and hemmorrhagic discoloration of the skin at the site of injury. We found that when fresh venom was injected subcutaneously into an animal, no swelling or hemorrhage appeared at the site of injection; and when venom was injected intramuscularly, no hemorrhage was noted. . . . . It is impossible, however, to absolutely rule out mechanical injury as a factor in causing the appearance of these local symptoms when an individual is bitten by a Heloderma. The animal has very powerful jaws and its bite would easily bruise a large area of flesh and skin. When the animal bites it clings tenaciously, and in endeavoring to extricate a wounded part of the injury might easily be increased."

WHETHER potassium permanganate is destructive to Heloderman venom is not determined. Therefore we can not recommend it as of value in case of a bite by this animal. We would only suggest releasing the bitten part as rapidly and yet as coolly and carefully as possible and then seeking a physician, perhaps first inducing some bleeding and then washing the wound with an antiseptic. The venom is not to be regarded as deadly to man, hence there is no need for hysterical fear.

In closing on Heloderma we would suggest that there is no good reason for remorselessly slaying every Gila Monster encountered. Rather should we class it with the road runner and the peccary as unique features of our fauna, a part of the characteristic landscape of Arizona, like the giant cactus among the flora of the State.

Also, in addition to a detailed statement of treatment for snake-bite and poisonous insect bites the Bulletin takes up another subject that has produced much argument —the "hydrophobia skunk." Its conclusion is that there is no particular species of skunk which can be designated as the "hydrophobia skunk," but that skunks are rather more likely to bite sleepers than are coyotes, wolves and dogs and that perhaps a larger proportion of bites from skunks produce rabies. Mr. Vorhies arrives at one "unavoidable conclusion"—in case of skunk-bite take the Pasteur treatment.

WHEN Captain Smith wrote the following letter he was in France. Some of you are sure to give him the information he wants, so will he, when he sees this, kindly give us his home address so I can forward letters to him?

Angers, France.

I noticed in one of your recent numbers a request for a poem from some party, and one of your other readers had supplied him with it, through your Camp-Fire pages. A number of years ago I read a poem called "The Ballad of Boastful Bill" in a book of cow-country ditties, and have never been able to get a copy of it since. All I can remember of it is as follows:

THE BALLAD OF BOASTFUL BILL

At a cow camp on the Gila,
  One sweet morning, long ago,
Ten of us was throwed right freely
  By a hoss from Idaho.
And it looked as though he'd go abegging
  For a man to bust his pride,
Till a-hitching up one legging,
  Boastful Bill cut loose an' cried:
    "I'm an ornery proposition for to hurt,
    I fulfill my earthly mission with a quirt.
    I can ride the highest liver
    Twixt the Gulf and Powder River,
    An' I'll ride this thing as easy as I'd flirt."

If any of you readers can supply the balance of this I would feel obliged. I will watch your Camp-Fire pages for results. Thanking you for your favor. *Adios.*—HERBERT R. SMITH, Capt. Signal Corps.

AS TO water-proof coating, here's a receipt:

Mound House, Nevada.

I see in the last "Ask Adventure" that Mer— (can't recall the name now) gives parrafine and benzine as a waterproofing mixture. I would like to say that beeswax dissolved in turpentine beats this all hollow. I also want to say for the benefit of the uninitiated that *any* waterproofing compound should be applied to canvas in more than one coat for the best result. Far better to take a thinner mixture and use it twice.—JOSEPH GRAY.

IN THE language of the poet, you can search me. Remember the strange manuscript picked up in a bottle on the Nova Scotian coast, which, passed on to

Camp-Fire, brought forth a number of interesting translations? Yes, and remember that Edgar Young confessed he and a friend had thrown it overboard in the South Atlantic as a hoax? Well, that seems to settle it, doesn't it? Only it doesn't. For the original sender writes indignantly that Young's message could not be the one he has because the latter was found before the date on which the hoax was pulled off.

Here's the letter from our Nova Scotian comrade—at least such part of it as it seems right to make public. I pointed out to the writer that Edgar Young's address appears in every issue of the magazine.

——, Nova Scotia.

While not disputing Edgar Young's veracity or intentions, I note that he says he did this in 1910 and I was a miner full grown and earning men's wages at a coal-face at that time. It was in 1909-1911 we Nova Scotia miners had our twenty-two months' strike for U. M. W. recognition.

NOW to the point I can not understand. Edgar Young says he wrote a message purporting to be from Blackburne in 1910. Well, this old chart was found when I was a school kid and I left school when 16, and am 36 years old now. My uncle died in 1894 and he and a chum found this old bottle in 1889. So how does that rhyme with Comrade Young's statement?

It's queer that there are two old —— about the locality of the bay and rivers indicated; also a good clear spring in a line with that tree and the anchorage; also that tree, which I have found and identified—by markings, which are similar to some on the old chart which Edgar Young no doubt can describe. What I can not understand is how he wrote it in 1910 and it was found in 1889, as I have ascertained by going over some files of old letters.

NOW, I'm not boosting this thing for publicity. I'm on the "lone" trail in this thing and have reason to believe that there is a rich find for some one. If, however, Edgar Young can describe that old chart and explain how it was written in 1910 and found in the Fall of 1889; also how I knew of it and took it to the high school principal here when a school kid of 14 or so and was a man of 27 when it was written, that's too psychological for me to comprehend. I would like to get hold of that old account of that pirate Blackburne as I think I've located the old fellow's favorite rendezvous.

I wonder if Edgar Young can tell me where to get it. Also I'd like to correspond with him to see if he can fully describe the locality drawn on that chart in my possession. If his claim is authentic and true, then the whole thing is a hoax perpetrated and invented for the purpose of misleading and deceiving. It certainly accomplished its purpose if so, for I know I've spent hours untold in corresponding about it and had offers to buy it from folks who could decipher part of it and not all (so they said), but were particularly anxious to see the original.

This has been no joke in our family.— —— ——.

And here is Edgar Young's reply:

Brooklyn.

The first thing that occurred to me when I read what that fellow had to say about the Capitan Blackburne manuscript was to shut up like a clam. He has his dates wrong and seems set on making a liar out of me. My first decision was to let that MS. remain a mystery and I was advised by a close friend to say nothing about it, even if I had written it. Fate seems to be mixed up in this and I was unable to follow my better judgment and remain silent.

THERE happens to be living proof to support the details I gave you in the former letter. This is the man who was with me and helped concoct the MS. Right here a funny thing comes in. This man and I parted in anger in Nicaragua in 1913 and have not spoken or written each other since. The cause of our disagreement was very slight and I have always kept track of him through others, for he was a true-blue pal, one of the only two I met up with. We made the trip from Colon down the east coast of South America and back up the other side, working in all the countries en route. He remained to work in Ecuador and I came to Panama to work for the Panama Railroad until he arrived. We both went to Nicaragua, where we worked as officials of the National Railways, I as auditor and he as general storekeeper. We separated after some seven months.

He blew up first and came to New York and I blew up later and came to San Francisco. Later he returned to Panama and went into the contracting business and was civil engineer for some Panama Government work. I understand he is now employed by the Panama Railway, or was the last time I asked about him. I am pretty sure he has kept track of me, in fact, I know he has, for a friend has passed along comments he has made on stories of mine that appeared in magazines.

I POSSIBLY owe him an apology for the words passed between us in Nicaragua, for he was really trying to keep me from making a —— fool out of myself, which I later did. But I do not intend to write him an apology now at the present time to get him to uphold a statement in regard to a fool MS. we placed in a bottle in 1910. Even if I did, proof obtained in this manner would be worthless. The best thing I can think of is to run the explanation I have given in Camp-Fire and right with it run the later letter of the man who has the MS. at the present time which makes a liar out of me. I am willing to appear in the rôle he has placed me. I am pretty sure that —— will come forward with a statement if he happens to see the letters, which he no doubt will see. If he does not, I will still be satisfied. However, I feel pretty sure he will not let that fellow put the Kobie on me.

IN THE meantime I have framed the card in a little frame I got at the five-and-ten and have it hanging on the wall over my desk. I remember the exact words that passed when the MS. was written. Part was written by each of us. I made the arrow pointing down stream, —— made the little house in the corner and the anchor. I don't remember whether we showed it to Captain Funcke or not. If we did he may see the discussion and come forward with further corroboration. He will no doubt remember the two strange passengers who refused to eat on the latter end of the voyage and whom he came to visit in the room of the best hotel in Rio after we landed, in company with a ship's chandler of the city.

It may be that some of the shipmates of this man's uncle will write in and state that the dates he has are in error, for they certainly are. I was born in 1883 and I am sure I did not write that before I was six years old. I am saying it was written with a Waterman's fountain-pen bought from the Panama Railroad newsstand at Gatun, of which Mrs. Nolte was in charge, on board the good ship *Merkador* between the 12th and 31st of December, 1910, and thrown overboard between Barbados and Rio.

These are the facts. If proof comes naturally, let it come. I have always been something of a fatalist. I don't know what reason Fate had for making me get mixed up in this. From present circumstances it looks as if she wanted to make a liar out of me. It may be that the MS. —— and I wrote was intended to bring us together after we had split up. *Quien sabe?* and again *Quien sabe?*

RIGHT here I rest my case. If you wish to use this letter, please use blank spaces for the names of —— and ——. For the love of *Miguel*, what reason would I have to claim authorship of a MS. the sea has returned? Don't the editors return enough of them? That's a good one! "Due to the supply of MSS. we have on hand from the Mermen and Mermaids, we herewith return as unavailable, etc."

It has just occurred to me that . . . . . . Let's find out. Let's get some dope on the other bottles that were thrown over at the same time and some of which I am sure have been found. Perhaps the ink, paper, etc., of these other messages contain proof.—*I am telling the truth and have nothing to fear from later developments.*—EDGAR YOUNG.

So there we are—or aren't. As I said in the beginning, you can search me. Two documents instead of one? Perhaps. A scheme to arouse interest and capital in a treasure-hunt? Doesn't sound so on the face of it. Quite a number of possible solutions offer themselves but no one of them proves itself.

But I'm not holding out on you, except, of course, the man's name and address, which he gave me in confidence. I can add only the fact that I never met him and know no more about him than you do, and the minor detail that when Edgar Young first wrote me that he had set that bottle adrift I replied asking whether he were kidding me and was assured that he was not. If the two men have corresponded since the above letters, I have not heard the results. But I'm writing to both and asking, so maybe there'll be more news later.

At least let's hope that Edgar Young's old pal comes across. The kind of man Mr. Young describes would hardly fail to toe the scratch in such a case if it comes to his attention.

OWING to something I don't remember but which was quite likely my own fault, Henry Leverage's introduction to Camp-Fire doesn't reach us in the same issue with our first story from him, but be easy on me and meet him now. If there are any of the old *Karluk* men among us they can write Mr. Leverage in care of this office.

New York.

In introducing myself to the Camp-Fire, I'm going to lie down, fill up my old cord-wrapped pipe, reach for a brand and between puffs, say:

"The Iron Dollar," my first story to sell to *Adventure*, is almost fact. I can see the picture now, coming home to San Francisco. A dirty, sawed-off whaler—twenty-four in the fo'cas'le—and only two American-born among them.

We had beans for all three meals over the period of two months. Beans—topped with salt-horse. The crew started promising certain things which were going to happen to the skipper. They sharpened knives and mentioned the first time they got the old man ashore.

WE LANDED and all hands went with the skipper into the nearest dive—it was called the "Blubber Room" in those days. He bought a round of steam beers, everybody shook hands with him, and he went out—without a knife in his back.

I dug in my dungaree trousers, fished forth a five-dollar gold-piece, and offered to buy a square meal. Twenty-three whalemen followed me into The Home Dairy Restaurant. They glanced at the menu card, coughed, stared at the wall where signs hung inscribed: "Roast-Beef, Very Rare; "Chicken Fricasee"; "Liver and Bacon."

They passed these up, grinned sheepishly, and all ordered baked beans.

The next day I signed off, received an Iron Dollar for eight months' labor, and bade good-by to the sea.

I wonder if any of the Camp-Fire readers were aboard the *Karluk* with Captain McGregor during the season of 1897? I would like to hear from them.—LEVERAGE.

IN SOME of Hugh Pendexter's earlier stories in our magazine we met the Oneidas pretty frequently and now here comes a comrade with their blood in his veins to talk with us. When he wrote, two days before the armistice was signed, he was serving on the U. S. S. *Roanoke*, so you see it has been a long time coming to the surface in our mail-bag. Perhaps by this time he is at the headwaters of the Amazon, according to his desire. But if Walter R. Johnson remembers him and will write him care of this office, Mr. Benton will probably get it sooner or later, for he sits in at our Camp-Fire whenever he's where he can get to it. Or I can forward to the name and address of friend registered for Mr. Benton's identification card.

I omit a small bit of his letter merely because it endorses the idea of a badge for us to wear and that badge has since then been adopted and come into use.

Mr. Benton spells it "Oniedoes," not "Oneidas," and, as his spelling is O.K. in the remainder of his letter, I'm wondering whether that is the French form or whether I'm all wrong as to Oneidas being the same tribe. I'm no wiseacre on our old Indian tribes, despite a strong interest in them.

U. S. S. *Roanoke.*

It has been a good while since I last wrote to you, but, I can not give any account of myself at present, for military reasons, but being a seaman for some years gone, you may be sure "Fritz" has received my calling-cards since we went into the war.

THERE'S one thing I can mention, I believe. About three months ago I was caught in one of the most beautiful ninety-mile gales that ever visited these parts, which shook all the tropic fever I ever contracted out of my bones. It turned the tugs to the beach, chased everything in general to shelter and left me to fight it out with a 36-footer. My boots, slicker and one perfectly good pair of wool socks were missing when I reached my rendezvous. Sorry I can not give a better description of the incident, but any shipmate that has had experience at sea knows how she is when she makes you wish you were a longshoreman instead of a common seafaring man.

AND I noticed also a letter from Mr. Walter R. Johnson, whom I believe I met in Quito, Ecuador, and later in Guacayilla, quite a few years ago, and if my memory serves me right, he offered me a comrade's hand and financial help. Perhaps my looks justified his offer, for at the time my sole possession was a dungarie suit and a suit of serge in the clothing line. But my most carefully guarded secret was 27 English pounds at that date. Four hours previous to our meeting I was beached from the English tramp *Union* for getting too affectionate with a pinch-bar. I was just barely in my teens then, and I haven't grown but one inch and gained four or five pounds since, so perhaps Mr. Johnson would still know me if we chanced to meet again, which I hope will be in the near future.

I may add that I have passed the expert rifle course since that time, and I long for the war's end. I crave a trip far up the headwaters of the Amazon and over the borders of Bolivia. Afterward I still expect to return to the States and become a settled "hombre." But I would be glad to hear from Mr. Johnson, and would appreciate meeting him again very much. I would also like to hear from Mr. Young.

So why not give it a trial? I have met many in my years at sea. The most famous of the places I like to go to (when I call there) is Wilcox's in Colon. I still cast a longing eye and heart in the direction of the San Blas country.

And I may say for the interest of all concerned that I am a half-cast of the famous old tribe of the Oniedoes (as we were called by the French) and now known as part of the "praying Indians" of the North Country, and the other half Scot-English. You may easily guess where my roving blood was picked up, and why it still burns.—LEARNY J. BENTON.

P. S.—I would be glad to hear from any member of Camp-Fire and will answer any inquiries that I can within reason.—L. J. B.

THIS letter was written November 22, 1918, probably reached me a month or so later, and has somehow got out of turn—as often happens—in the mass of good material waiting to be heard at Camp-Fire. [illegible] sorry for the delay, but the letter has lost none of its interest. Americans serving with the Australians in Egypt and the Holy Land! Of course, but even yet we're not quite used to the mixing up the war gave this old world and its peoples.

Penmanship? What do we care about his penmanship except to be sorry he didn't come through the war-furnace unsinged?

Port Said, Egypt.

I have never written to you before, but would like to join the Camp-Fire gatherings.

I AM serving under the Australian flag, with the Australian Light Horse, the cavalry that has done the great work in Gallipoli Peninsula, Egypt, Sinai, Palestine and Syria. There are many more Yanks serving here in the Australian forces besides me. We are keeping up the name of the dear old States over here.

I have had some great experiences since I left home. I have traveled about the Hawaiian Islands, Society and Cook Islands, the Philippine, Celebes, Borneo islands and knocked about China, Japan, Australia, Ceylon and India. I have seen Gallipoli, all of Egypt, Sinai, Palestine and a good bit of Syria since I have been here. I have had many thrilling adventures in my travels, and was shipwrecked on an uninhabited island in the China Sea for ten days.

Now that the war is over, I will return to America.

I am a lover of tropical countries, and islands, so I intend to do more traveling about looking for adventure, after spending several months with my old folks at home.—Trooper C. H. DETERT, A. I. F., Egypt.

P. S.—Please excuse my penmanship, as my nerves are shattered.

ONE of you suggested the old Indian sign as a kind of greeting or sign for members of Camp-Fire when they meet or when one of them wants to know whether some other fellow is a member. (I suppose there is still need to explain that any one is a member who wishes to be.) I wrote to "Uncle Frank" Huston to be sure of just how the sign is made. He says:

> Hand up, palm forward, thumb and fingers joined. You've made the sign often and never knew what it was. Of course, made casually and quickly, the fingers are not always stuck and glued together. Sometimes the hand is not raised above the shoulder; again, level with ear; again, top of head.

So there is the sign if any of you ever care to use it. If you do, you'd better say so, so that we can mention it at Camp-Fire now and then to be sure that all members, new and old, understand what it signifies in our case.

CACTUS, barrel and giant. Some more about it from one of our Southwestern comrades:

Prescott, Ariz.

Just move along a bit, will you, and make room for me to sit next you at the Camp-Fire circle?

IN THE Camp-Fire of your Sept. 3rd issue is a letter which I found interesting and also somewhat a bit in error. The barrel cactus, which is a source of water for the desert wanderer, is quite accurately described by him; the thorns are hooked slightly and are rather more elliptical in cross section than flat, as he describes. These thorns are about 3 in. in length. The cactus grows from 3 to 4 ft. in height. The best way to procure the water it contains is to cut off the top as one cuts the top of a soft-boiled egg when set in an egg-cup, dig out a bowl-shaped hollow, take a long-bladed knife or a clean, sharp stick and jab it up and down in the pulp, thus freeing the water which will accumulate in the bowl prepared. Quite a quantity of refreshing liquor will thus be secured and it is a God-send to the man on the desert whose water supply has been exhausted.

The other cactus he refers to is the giant cactus, properly called saguaro (pronounced in this part of the country and in Mexico "sah-hwar-ro" and generally incorrectly spelled by the story writers). I have seen this cactus attain a height of 40 to 50 ft. in many localities of the Southwest. I am enclosing a photo of a comparatively small one beside which I had my driver stand for a comparison. Being a bit nearer the camera than the cactus, he is a little larger in perspective than his true relative height would be. The other small photo is of a group of young saguaros, which was so unusual an occurrence for the number grouped that I thought the photo worth taking. The large photo is of a young saguaro and behind it is an ocotillo (pronounced "o-ko-teel-yo").

NOW a bit of criticism. If the comrade whose letter I read walked from "Meyer" (Mayer) to Phœnix, he probably took the Black Cañon road, which passes *east* of the Black Cañon proper and between it and the Agua Fria River, crossing the latter at Cañon, where it takes a short turn to the west just below the mouth of the Black Cañon, before continuing its southerly course. I hardly think he would have walked through the Black Cañon unless prospecting for mineral. And *en route* to Phœnix from Mayer he does not get anywhere near Cave Creek, which is quite some miles to the east of the Agua Fria, but he will cross Cave Creek *Wash* after he has got down on to the desert which is a continuation of the Salt River Valley, to the west.—CHAS. EDWARD MAJOR.

LOOKING AHEAD FOR DEMOCRACY

THIS Summer, at the National Classical Conference at the National Education Association's convention in Milwaukee, the dean of Princeton University voiced the aim of the Conference—the study of the classics must be maintained "because they are vitally important to our own language." "And," said the dean, "to insist that there is no education worth the name unless it involves training the mind; not for the sake of money, place or power, but in order to develop our boys and girls to their highest mental and moral excellence, to make them masters in thought and in expression, and thus to send them out equipped for lives of the highest usefulness."

"Highest mental and moral excellence," taken in its broadest sense and given fullest application, is a sufficiently high and comprehensive aim. But when stated as justification for an organized movement to maintain the study of Latin and Greek in our schools and colleges it crumbles into dry scholastic dust, proclaiming a vision of man's place and usefulness in the social order that is academic in the worst sense of the word, narrow, hopelessly behind the march of real civilization.

LATIN and Greek. I had five years of one and four of the other and to my own testimony I can add that of ninety-odd per cent. of all other "classically educated" men and women whom I have questioned that such expenditure of time and training on these subjects is misguided waste. Except for the extremely small proportion of students who fit themselves for the clergy, professorships or certain scientific lines.

Mind training? Why not get the same kind of training by learning modern languages that will be of infinitely more, and more practical, use? These do not demand the same stiff mental labor? Wherein is Greek stiffer than real study of academic Spanish? And is Russian such child's play?

And is it definitely established that the study of any language is necessary to proper training of the mind?

The excuse of "training" is a childish one.

Is it, then, that we should have some knowledge and understanding of the customs, history and genius of the two peoples who so greatly shaped civilization? That is worth having—unless it crowds from the boards more vital things. But which gives more of it—time given to conjugations and struggling translation, or a direct, intensive study of the thing itself instead of its medium of expression?

CULTURE? What *is* culture? Our own conception of it is as narrow and as selfish as the Hun's conception which he calls *Kultur*. He frankly tramples on the rights and welfare of others; ours is more dainty and anemic and merely turns its back upon these things.

With us culture is a matter of learning, not of wisdom or understanding or even of common sense. To most Americans "culture" connotates literature, painting, sculpture, music, history, the niceties of social attitude and behavior. I grew up in that atmosphere and yet there always arises to me one smashing question—what right has any one to "culture" while a stone's throw from him people are being starved or maimed in body, mind or soul who need not be thus starved and maimed if their brothers and sisters would think less of this artificial culture and vastly more of their obligations in making human beings happier and more comfortable? How do *you* answer that question?

Some day our whole selfish, cold conception of culture will crumple up and vanish before the demands of the facts of life. Just as our whole stupid, selfish, inherited conception of education has already begun to crumple under the blows of life itself.

LATIN and Greek. Yes, they have their values. But with preventable human misery everywhere staring us in the face, with our politics filthy in corruption, our economic fabric black with selfishness and cruelty, and the very pillars of our whole social structure shaking, then the culture and training from Latin and Greek become small things in the scheme of life.

Present culture and education have but one excuse to offer and either too little or too much brains to offer it, the excuse of Cain, the first murderer—"Am I my brother's keeper?" Some day they will realize that they can have but one sound excuse, one possible purpose—making the Golden Rule more and more a practical part of real living.

A fantastic dream? Not if you understand the Golden Rule to be not a vague text from a book in which you may not believe but the one and only practical, work-a-day principle that can bring the greatest good to the greatest number.

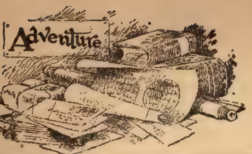
LATIN and Greek! What good to teach a boy Latin and Greek when you fail to teach him to be a good citizen? Is the purpose of public schools merely to teach each individual how best he can advance his own selfish interest? Or is it to teach each one how each profits from all and all from each and that the "public welfare" is not an empty phrase but a direct and practical obligation laid upon him?

And until we Americans learn that truth and begin to practise it neither Labor nor Capital, Republicans nor Democrats, Socialism, Bolshevism nor democracy, nor any other class, party or theory can get for us what every one of these claims it will get for us. You can not build a sound house out of rotten bricks, nor a sound government out of bad citizens.

There is no magic remedy. There can be no real democracy except in the minds of the people. You can put it there only by education. The only way to get that education working is by systematic, organized effort.

Latin and Greek! Leave them in the schools if there is room, but let them have no place whatever until you're sure the schools are making it their first task to make good citizens by direct teaching.

Can't be done? It can be taught as easily as the classics, economics, history and all the rest. Do you not teach your own children moral standards? If you can teach your child individual morals can you not teach him social morals?—A. S. H.



ARIOUS PRACTICAL SERVICES FREE TO ANY READER

THESE services of *Adventure* are free to *any one.* They involve much time, work and expense on our part, but we offer them gladly and ask in return only that you *read and observe the simple rules*, thus saving needless delay and trouble for you and us. The whole spirit of this magazine is one of friendliness. No formality between editors and readers. Whenever we *can* help you we're ready and willing to try.

Identification Cards

Free to any reader. Just send us (1) your name and address, (2) name and address of party to be notified, (3) a stamped and self-addressed return envelope.

Each card bears this inscription, each printed in English, French, Spanish, German, Portuguese, Dutch, Italian, Arabic, Chinese, Russian and Japanese:

"In case of death or serious emergency to bearer, address serial number of this card, care of *Adventure*, New York, stating full particulars, and friends will be notified."

In our office, under each serial number, will be registered the name of bearer and of one or two friends, with permanent address of each. No name appears on the card. Letters will be forwarded to friend, unopened by us. Names and addresses treated as confidential. We assume no other obligations. Cards not for business identification. Cards furnished free *provided stamped and addressed envelope accompanies application.* We reserve the right to use our own discretion in all matters pertaining to these cards.

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A moment's thought will show the value of this system of card-identification for any one, whether in civilization or out of it. Remember to furnish stamped and addressed envelope and to *give in full the names and addresses of self and friend or friends when applying.*

If check or money order is sent, please make it out to the Ridgway Company, *not* to any individual.

Missing Friends or Relatives

Our free service department "Lost Trails" in the pages following, though frequently used in cases where detective agencies, newspapers, and all other methods have failed, or for finding people long since dead, has located a very high percentage of those inquired for. Except in case of relatives, inquiries from one sex to the other are barred.

Back Issues of *Adventure*

WILL BUY: First Jan. to First Sept., 1919.—Address, FRANK C. S. SUMPTER, Indian Valley, Va.

WILL SELL: All issues of 1915, 1916, 1917 and 1918—sixty-four copies in all—fifteen cents each, plus postage.—Address, A. M. SMALL, Teaticket, Mass.

The Boston Magazine Exchange, 109 *Mountfort St., Boston, Mass., can supply* Adventure *back through* 1918, *and occasional copies before that.*

General Questions from Readers

In addition to our free service department "Ask Adventure" on the pages following, *Adventure* can sometimes answer other questions within our general field. When it can, it will. Expeditions and employment excepted.

Manuscripts

Glad to look at any manuscript. We have no "regular staff" of writers. A welcome for new writers. *It is not necessary to write asking to submit your work.*

When submitting a manuscript, if you write a letter concerning it, enclose it *with* the manuscript; do *not* send it under separate cover. Enclose stamped and addressed envelope for return. All manuscripts should be typewritten double-spaced, with wide margins, not rolled, name and address on first page. We assume no risk for manuscripts or illustrations submitted, but use all due care while they are in our hands. Payment on acceptance.

We want only clean stories. Sex, morbid, "problem," psychological and supernatural stories barred. Use almost no fact-articles. Can not furnish or suggest collaborators. Use fiction of almost any length; under 3000 welcomed.

Mail Address and Forwarding Service

This office, assuming no responsibility, will be glad to act as a forwarding address for its readers or to hold mail till called for, provided necessary postage is supplied. Unclaimed mail which we have held for a long period is listed on the last page of this issue.

Camp-Fire Buttons

To be worn on lapel of coat by members of Camp-Fire—any one belongs who wishes to. Enameled in dark colors representing earth, sea and sky, and bears the numeral 71—the sum of the letters of the word Camp-Fire valued according to position in the alphabet. Very small and inconspicuous. Designed to indicate the common interest which is the only requisite for membership in Camp-Fire and to enable members to recognize each other when they meet in far places or at home. Twenty-five cents, postpaid, anywhere.

When sending for the button enclose a strong, self-addressed, *un*stamped envelope.

If check or money order is sent, please make it out to the Ridgway Company, *not* to any individual.

Expeditions and Employment

While we should like to be of aid in these matters, experience has shown that it is not practicable.

Addresses

Order of the Restless—Organizing to unite for fellowship all who feel the wanderlust. First suggested in this magazine, though having no connection with it aside from our friendly interest. Address WAYNE EBERLY, 1833 S St., N. W., Washington, D. C.

Camp-Fire—Any one belongs who wishes to.

High-School Volunteers of the U. S.—An organization promoting a democratic system of military training in American high schools. Address *Everybody's*, Spring and Macdougal Streets, New York City.

Rifle Clubs—Address Nat. Rifle Ass'n of America, 1108 Woodward Bldg., Washington, D. C.

(*See also under "Standing Information" in "Ask Adventure."*)

Remember

Magazines are made up ahead of time. An item received to-day is too late for the current issue; allow for two or three months between sending and publication.

Ask Adventure

A Free Question and Answer Service Bureau of Information on Outdoor Life and Activities Everywhere and Upon the Various Commodities Required Therein. Conducted for *Adventure* Magazine by Our Staff of Experts.

QUESTIONS should be sent, not to this office, but direct to the expert in charge of the department in whose field it falls. So that service may be as prompt as possible, he will answer you by mail direct. But he will also send to us a copy of each question and answer, and from these we shall select those of most general interest and publish them each issue in this department, thus making it itself an exceedingly valuable standing source of practical information. Unless otherwise requested, inquirer's name and town are printed with question; street numbers not given.

When you ask for *general* information on a given district or subject the expert will probably give you some valuable general pointers and refer you to books or to local or special sources of information.

Our experts will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their departments subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assumes any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible. These experts have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but for their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a given commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

1. **Service free to anybody, provided stamped and addressed envelope is enclosed. Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries will please enclose International Reply Coupons, purchasable at any post-office, and exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union.**
2. **Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular department whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. Do NOT send questions to this magazine.**
3. **No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.**
4. **Make your questions definite and specific. State exactly your wants, qualifications and intentions. Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.**
5. **Send no question until you have read very carefully the exact ground covered by the particular expert in whose department it seems to belong.**

1. ★ Islands and Coasts
CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE, Cove Cottage, Pembroke West, Bermuda. Islands of Indian and Atlantic oceans; the Mediterranean; Cape Horn and Magellan Straits. Ports, trade, peoples, travel.

2. The Sea Part 1
BERIAH BROWN, Seattle Press Club, 1309 Fifth Ave., N. E., Seattle, Wash. Covering ships, seamen and shipping; nautical history, seamanship, navigation, yachting; commercial fisheries of North America; marine bibliography of U. S. and British Empire; seafaring on fishing-vessels of the North Atlantic and Pacific banks, small-boat sailing, and old-time shipping and seafaring.

3. ★ The Sea Part 2
CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE, Cove Cottage, Pembroke West, Bermuda. Such questions as pertain to the sea, ships and men local to the U. S. should be sent to Captain Dingle, not Mr. Brown.

4. Eastern U. S. Part 1
RAYMOND S. SPEARS, Little Falls, N. Y. Covering Mississippi, Ohio, Tennessee, Michigan and Hudson valleys; Great Lakes, Adirondacks, Chesapeake Bay; river, lake and road travel, game, fish and woodcraft; furs, freshwater pearls, herbs; and their markets.

5. Eastern U. S. Part 2
HAPSBURG LIBBE, 6 W. Concord Ave., Orlando, Florida. Covering Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, and N. and S. Carolina, Florida and Georgia except Tennessee River and Atlantic seaboard. Hunting, fishing, camping; logging, lumbering, sawmilling, saws.

6. Eastern U. S. Part 3
DR. G. E. HATHORNE, 44 Central Street, Bangor, Maine. Covering Maine; fishing, hunting, canoeing, guides, outfits, supplies.

7. Middle Western U. S. Part 1
CAPT.-ADJ. JOSEPH MILLS HANSON, care *Adventure*. Covering the Dakotas, Nebraska, Iowa, Kansas. Hunting, fishing, travel. *Especially* early history of Missouri valley.

8. Middle Western U. S. Part 2
JOHN B. THOMPSON, P. O. Box 1374, St. Louis, Mo. Covering Missouri, Arkansas and the Missouri Valley up to Sioux City, Iowa. Wilder countries of the Ozarks, and swamps; hunting, fishing, trapping, farming, mining and range lands; big timber sections.

9. Western U. S. Part 1
E. E. HARRIMAN, 2303 W. 23d St., Los Angeles, Calif. Covering California, Oregon, Washington, Utah, Nevada, Arizona. Game, fur, fish; camp, cabin; mines, minerals; mountains.

10. Western U. S. Part 2 and Mexico Part 1
J. B. WHITEAKER, Cedar Park, Texas. Covering Texas, Oklahoma, and the border states of old Mexico: Sonora, Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo Leon and Tamaulipas. Minerals, lumbering, agriculture, travel, customs; topography, climate, natives, hunting, history, industries.

11. Mexico Part 2 Southern
EDGAR YOUNG, care *Adventure Magazine*, Spring and Macdougal Sts., New York, N. Y. Covering that part of Mexico lying south of a line drawn from Tampico to Mazatlan. Mining, agriculture, topography, travel, hunting, lumbering, history, natives, commerce.

12. North American Snow Countries Part 1
R. S. SPEARS, Little Falls, N. Y. Covering Minnesota and Wisconsin. Hunting, fishing, trapping; canoes and snowshoes; methods and materials of Summer and Winter subsistence, shelter and travel, for recreation or business.

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Return postage not required from U. S. or Canadian soldiers, sailors or marines in service outside the U. S., its possessions, or Canada.

13. ★ North American Snow Countries Part 2
S. E. Sangster ("Canuck"), L. B. 393, Ottawa, Canada. Covering Height of Land and northern parts of Quebec and Ontario (except strip between Minn. and C. P. R'y); southeastern parts of Ungava and Keewatin. Trips for sport, canoe routes, big game, fish, fur; equipment; Summer, Autumn and Winter outfits; Indian life and habits; Hudson's Bay Co. posts; minerals, timber; customs regulations. No questions answered on trapping for profit.

14. North American Snow Countries Part 3
Harry M. Moore, Deseronto, Ont., covering south-eastern Ontario and the lower Ottawa Valley. Fishing, hunting, canoeing, mining, lumbering, agriculture, topography, travel, camping.

15. ★ North American Snow Countries Part 4
George L. Catton, Gravenhurst, Muskoka, Ont., Canada. Covering Southern Ontario and Georgian Bay. Fishing, hunting, trapping, canoeing.

16. North American Snow Countries Part 5
Ed. L. Carson, Burlington, Wash. Covering Yukon, British Columbia and Alberta including Peace River district; to Great Slave Lake. Outfits and equipment, guides, big game, minerals, forest, prairie; travel; customs regulations.

17. North American Snow Countries Part 6
Theodore S. Solomons, 2837 Fulton St., Berkeley, Calif. Covering Alaska. Arctic life and travel; boats, packing, back-packing, traction, transport, routes; equipment, clothing, food; physics, hygiene; mountain work.

18. North American Snow Countries Part 7
H. S. Belcher, The Hudson's Bay Company, Ft. Alexander, Manitoba, Canada. Covering Manitoba, Saskatchewan, MacKenzie and Northern Keewatin. Homesteading, mining, hunting, trapping, lumbering and travel.

19. Hawaiian Islands and China
F. J. Halton, 632 S. Michigan Ave., Chicago, Ill. Covering customs, travel, natural history, resources, agriculture, fishing, hunting.

20. Central America
Edgar Young, care *Adventure Magazine*, Spring and Macdougal Sts., New York, N. Y. Covering Canal Zone, Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, British Honduras, Salvador, Guatemala. Travel, customs, language, game, local conditions, minerals, trading.

21. South America Part 1
Edgar Young, care *Adventure Magazine*, Spring and Macdougal Sts., New York, N. Y. Covering Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia and Chile. Geography, inhabitants, history, industries, topography, minerals, game, languages, customs.

22. South America Part 2
P. H. Goldsmith, *Inter-American Magazine*, 407 West 117th St., New York, N. Y. Covering Venezuela, The Guianas, Brazil, Uruguay, Paraguay and Argentine Republic. Travel, history, customs, industries, topography, natives, languages, hunting and fishing.

23. Asia, Southern
Gordon McCreagh, 21 East 14th St., New York City. Covering Red Sea, Persian Gulf, India, Tibet, Burma, Western China, Siam, Andamans, Malay States, Borneo, the Treaty Ports; hunting, trading, traveling.

24. Philippine Islands
Buck Connor, Box 807A.—R. F. D. No. 10, Los Angeles, California. Covering history, natives, topography, customs, travel, hunting, fishing, minerals, agriculture, exports and imports; manufacturing.

25. Japan
Grace P. T. Knudson, Castine, Maine. Covering Japan: Commerce, politics, people, customs, history, geography, travel, agriculture, art, curios.

26. Russia and Eastern Siberia
Major A. M. Lochwitzky (Formerly Lieut.-Col. I. R. A., Ret.), Austin, Texas. Covering Petrograd and its province; Finland, Northern Caucasus; Primorsk District, Island of Sakhalien; travel, hunting, fishing; explorations among native tribes; markets, trade, curios.

27. Africa Part 1
Thomas S. Miller, Eagle Bird Mine, Washington, Nevada Co., Calif. Covering the Gold, Ivory and Fever Coasts of West Africa, the Niger River from the delta to Jebba, Northern Nigeria. Canoeing, labor, trails, trade, expenses, outfitting, flora; tribal histories, witchcraft, savagery.

28. Africa Part 2
George E. Holt, Frederick, Md. Covering Morocco; travel, tribes, customs, history, etc.

29. ★ Africa Part 3. Portuguese East Africa
R. W. Waring, Corunna, Ontario, Canada. Covering trade, produce, climate, opportunities, game, wild life, travel, expenses, outfits, health, etc.

30. ★ Africa Part 4. Transvaal, N.W. and Southern Rhodesia, British East Africa, Uganda and the Upper Congo
Charles Beadle, 7 Place de Tertre, Paris, XVIII, France. Covering geography, hunting, equipment, trading, climate, mining, transport, customs, living conditions, witchcraft, opportunities for adventure and sport.

31. ★ New Zealand, Cook Islands and Samoa
Tom L. Mills, *The Feilding Star*, Feilding, New Zealand. Covering New Zealand, Cook Islands and Samoa. Travel, history, customs; opportunities for adventurers, explorers and sportsmen.

32. ★ Australia and Tasmania
Albert Goldie, Hotel Sydney, Sydney, Australia. Covering customs, resources, travel, hunting, sports, politics, history.

FIREARMS, PAST AND PRESENT

Rifles, shotguns, pistols, revolvers and ammunition. (Any questions on the arms adapted to a particular locality should *not* be sent to this department but to the "Ask Adventure" editor covering the district in question.)

A.—All Shotguns (including foreign and American makes). J. B. Thompson, Box 1374, St. Louis, Mo.

B.—All Rifles, Pistols and Revolvers (including foreign and American makes). D. Wiggins, Salem, Ore.

FISHING IN NORTH AMERICA

Salt and Fresh Water Fishing

J. B. Thompson, Box 1374, St. Louis, Mo. Covering fishing-tackle and equipment; fly and bait casting; live bait; camping outfits; fishing trips.

STANDING INFORMATION

For general information on U. S. and its possessions, write Sup't of Public Documents, Wash., D. C., for catalog of all Government publications.

For the Philippines and Porto Rico, the Bureau of Insular Affairs, War Dep't Wash., D. C.

For Alaska, the Alaska Bureau, Chamber of Commerce, Central Bldg., Seattle, Wash.

For Hawaii, Hawaii Promotion Committee, Chamber of Commerce, Honolulu, T. H. Also, Dep't of the Interior, Wash., D. C.

For Cuba, Bureau of Information, Dep't of Agri., Com., and Labor, Havana, Cuba.

For Central and South America, John Barrett, Dir. Gen. Pan-American Union, Wash., D. C.

For R. N. W. M. P., Comptroller Royal Northwest Mounted Police, Ottawa, Can., or Commissioner, R. N. W. M. P., Regina, Sask. Only unmarried British subjects, age 22 to 30, above 5 ft. 8 in. and under 175 lbs., accepted.

For Canal Zone, the Panama Canal Commission, Wash., D. C.

For U. S., its possessions and most foreign countries, the Dep't of Com., Wash., D. C.

FOR ARMY, NAVY OR MARINE CORPS

Accurate, free information. What the Government is doing for discharged soldiers and sailors. Facts not opinions given. No questions answered involving criticism or bestowing praise or blame. Enclose stamped addressed envelope. Address—SERVICE, The Home Sector, Spring and Macdougal Streets, New York City, New York.

★ (*Enclose addressed envelope with 5 cents in stamps NOT attached*)

The following "Ask Adventure" editors are now serving in our military forces. We hope you will be patient if their answers are at times delayed: Capt.-Adj. Joseph Mills Hanson; Major A. M. Lochwitzky.

Winter Hunting in Alaska

THERE is game a plenty for the man who is used to roughing it; and game of the sort one can seldom find in any other part of North America. Then there is the joy of the vast, silent places—the inimitable wilderness:

Question:—"I should like to get some information regarding the best place in Alaska, or northwest Canada, to spend several months. I mean a place where is plenty of big game, and far enough from civilization that one will not be molested by others. Would I have to employ a guide for such a trip?

What is the regulation regarding hunting in Alaska, also in regard to .38 Colt Revolver and .351 Automatic Winchester Rifle? Do you think that one could find enough excitement to spend a whole Winter up there; if so, could two men carry enough equipment for the Winter? As we are accustomed to traveling light we would expect rough conditions. Could the trip be made in a canoe?

Any information concerning the route, place and equipment (clothing rations, etc.,) will be thankfully received.

What would you estimate the cost of the trip for two fellows?"—W. E. Wentworth, U. S. Army.

Answer, by Mr. Solomons:—You only have to employ a guide on the Kenai Peninsula, south of the new railroad that is being built. Elsewhere a guide is unnecessary and a nuisance. The country is so big and services of guides so little in demand that there are no such things that are reliable. Any weapons dependable in the States here are usable and satisfactory in Alaska, except that for bull moose and the Alaska grizzly—a not very frequently met animal—you want a pretty fairly heavy bore gun of high power. Otherwise, as to firearms in general, I advise light ones to meet the difficulty of getting over the ground, which is not inconsiderable in the north, and which calls for as light equipment as possible.

I couldn't promise you "excitement" for a Winter in Alaska, as it's a rather quiet country and you do quite a bit of traveling for what you see and get. But if you're looking for a change, and solitude and wildness, and a fair amount of game, that's the place.

You could ascend or descend a river to a suitable place, in a canoe, taking enough essentials for a Winter in the country. But I do not advise this unless you're bridle-wise to the undertaking. It means living mostly on the country.

You'd need little equipment. That part would be all right. But the grub end of it might "give you pause."

An Alaskan Winter is a long time and you eat a great deal, and your canoe, to be handily handled, will not land you where you want to be with a great deal of grub, after your other impedimenta is deducted. But a steamer will land you anywhere on either of the several big rivers, and with enough grub to be comfortable. A very short distance from some such point you could probably obtain the surroundings and habitat you seek and could get your outfit there quite easily.

For a Summer's trip a canoe trip would be very nice, or one with a poling boat, and you might run into some game—some small game, of course. But as you do not specify your preferences, I could not advise any definite part of Alaska as your objective.

As to the cost of the trip—there is not much to pay after you leave the last transportation company with your outfit. The cost of the latter you can estimate for yourself. The cost of getting it into the country will be about equal to the fare of one man (outfit for two) to wherever you go. But if you buy all your heavier stuff in Alaska, as you should, it will probably come to somewhat less. That's all I can give you without specified inquiries as to "routes, place, equipment, clothing, rations."

Planting the South Sea Islands

HERE is some information which Mr. Mills could not give you while the war was on. Do you want a plantation where the climate is glorious; where nearly every conceivable kind of fruit and grain can be raised; where one can choose, temperate, semitropical, or torrid lands; where the fishing is unsurpassed and the hunting fine? There's plenty of elbow-room still in the world where one can make more than a mighty good living:

Question:—"I am greatly interested in the South Sea Islands as a money-making proposition; I mean planting and also adventure. I am a motor mechanic by trade, nineteen years old. My questions are:

1. What is the best and cheapest way to get there?
2. What are the best islands to settle in?
3. What are the best things to plant for quick results?
4. How much capital would be required?
5. What is the per cent. profit one could reasonably expect?
6. What is the white population of most South Sea Islands?
7. Are motor tractors used at all, and how is the planting done?"—Leonard J. Richards, Bendigo, Australia.

Answer, by Mr. Mills:—Now that the war is over, you can get much information on the islands that was forbidden during the course of the war. By the way, if you will allow me the interpellation, this is a good tip, too, for the other readers of *Adventure* who have asked me for details which were forbidden by the War Censor. It will interest all and sundry to learn that when I started answering questions for "Ask Adventure" I recommended my correspondents to write to the Union and other shipping companies trading in the South Seas, asking them to send copies of their very interesting pamphlets on tours of the Islands. Some of my replies were opened by the Censor, and then I got an intimation from the Union S. S. Co. that their pamphlets had been withdrawn from circulation during the war period. I think that you can apply to the Melbourne office of the Union Steamship Company or the office of the Burns Philp Company, Sydney or Brisbane, for a copy of their pamphlets describing tours of the Islands and on the conditions prevailing there. They are highly informative publications. Now let me get at your seven queries seriatim:

1. The best and cheapest way to the islands from Bendigo will be either from Sydney or Brisbane, according to the group you decide upon. That you should fix upon after perusing the suggested pamphlets. Fares have altered so much during the war period that I can not answer as to cheapness. Here again the pamphlets will be of value. Be sure to tell the shipping company just what you want.

2. Write to the Honorable the Minister of the Interior, Melbourne, and ask him whether any special inducements are on offer for settlers in the New Guinea (Papua) Group and other parts of the South Seas that Australia now occupies. Make sure of the climates, picking one that will suit you.

3. Depends upon the group you choose. You have a choice between oranges, bananas, copra (coconuts)—and what about cotton?

4. Have your pocket pretty well lined. Money makes money even in the islands. Here again I must be general, not definite. The money needed depends upon the area you desire to take up.

5. As in other parts of the world, profits are according to persistence.

6. Not many white folks on any of the groups. Off the beaten track the whites are very few. There is quite a settlement of whites on Rarotonga, in the Cook Group, and in Samoa.

7. The Islands have many of the conveniences of modern life, but I have not heard that they are up to date with motor tractors. The plowing is done in the good old-fashioned way.

Prospecting the Andes

IN THAT wild, little known country on the eastern slope of the Andes, in Ecuador, many believe bonanzas are to be found. It's a land where only the daring and the strong can succeed—the land of the savage Jivaro. One man brought out a bag of gold, but was insane. Other parties have gone in, never to return. Still, fortunes are being made there:

Question:—"I am anxious to obtain some information on the advisability of a trip to the west coast of South America, under the conditions mentioned.

There are two of us who will make this trip. Our training and experience consists of many years of roughing it in the Yukon territory and Alaska, and a university training in geology at one of the best universities. Have had a wide practical knowledge of metal mining, including placer and mining geology.

The primary object of this proposed trip would be to prospect for gold and silver, and due to a lack of knowledge of the mineral resources of the country, you might state the most advantageous section, which would be free from malaria and other diseases and still possess some good possibilities.

What would be the cost of such a trip from San Francisco, including fare and equipment? Please mention the caliber and make of any firearms we would need, considering the laws of the country in question with regard to the importing of firearms, the size of the game and the chance of securing ammunition.

Would you advise the purchase of burros upon our arrival, to carry equipment and provisions? What would be their cost? Would the hostility of the natives hinder us in any way in the section you would suggest?"—VICTOR E. EKHOLM, Strawn, Texas.

Answer, by Mr. Young:—Possibly the richest country in minerals of all South America is the republic of Colombia, said to be the richest boundary of land above water in the entire world. Since 1739, 12,728 gold mines have made good, and for the past year the average in gold exported has been over 300,000 dollars' worth per month. The amount of silver that has been exported staggers the imagination. Colombia also furnished the world with the bulk of its emeralds, mainly from the famous Muzo district, from which emeralds have been mined since immemorial times.

The platinum of Colombia is much purer than the Russian metal and the supply is increasing yearly. Formerly this metal was thrown away and was a source of much trouble to the miners to get rid of it from the gold. Now they are digging up the streets where it was formerly thrown and panning the dirt. Copper, tin, lead, zinc, mercury, antimony, arsenic, sulphur, coal, asphalt, petroleum, iron, rubies, sapphires, garnets, amethysts are being extracted and exported.

However, for the prospector, due to the fact that Colombia has been fairly well prospected over, I would suggest Ecuador as a more likely spot to make a rich strike. This is the same kind of country and the minerals have scarcely been touched. I was talking last week to a man who made the trip from Rio Bamba by foot to the Napo, and on down to Iquitos by boat, and he told me he saw the Indians with lots of dust to trade.

There is a tribe of very hostile Indians called the Jiveros, or Jivaros, up above where he struck the river, and it is impossible to get up into their country, due to the fact that they will not allow a white man nor neighboring Indians to enter. This man's name is Walter R. Johnson.

When I was in Ecuador a few years ago I met up with a Mr. Morley at Huigra and he also told me about rich gold country over there. There was a party went in and the lone man who came out, a negro, the ninth man of the party, who came out at Para, brought a huge bag of very large nuggets out with him. He was crazy as a loon, but drew a map after he got back here in the United States. Another party came down with the map this negro had made and after they went in nothing was ever heard of them. Walter Johnson told me they were above the little village of Napo, which is Jivero, and bad country. He says there is no danger below this village, but plenty of it above. Also he claimed the Indians were very tame after you leave Napo going downstream. The way he put it, he said he would guarantee that a man struck good placer ground on this river. The Ecuadorian people are buffaloed by those Indians over there, and there is a chance that there is a bonanza located there. You can take that with salt if you want to; you know how visionary we old prospectors get to be, and Walt is as bad as I am.

That is the country I would pick if I went back in South America to prospect, due to the following reasons: Colombia has been pretty well located up, Peru was worked out fairly well by the Incas, Bolivia is solid full of mineral, and has many companies looking it over, Chili is mostly nitrates, and water is scarce.

My next bet would be either Venezuela or the Guianas, and then northern Brazil.

There is a railroad operated by an American company running up into the interior of Ecuador to Quito from Duran, just across the river from Guayaquil. Guayaquil is a hell-hole for fever, but after an hour's ride you are above the fever line and it begins to get cool. You can go from sea level to perpetual snow.

The climate after you get into the high plateau about 10,000 feet high, is delightful. The good prospecting country is on the eastern slope of the country, to my notion, in the extreme headwaters of the rivers flowing into the Amazon. Right at Rio Bamba you cross a stream that could float a canoe which flows into the Amazon. It could float one, but it would be hard work, for it's just a few feet across at this point. I looked at it with this view in mind and believe by wading part of the way until a man reached more water he could run a canoe right from Rio Bamba, if he took it easy and did not get smashed up.

There is a road running back into the Archidona district from Quito, and the trip can be made by mule to Papallacta. There is a man in Papallacta who sends mules to Quito to bring people out. From there it's pack work with Indian packers. I think they charge five dollars (U. S.) for the eighteen days pack (per Indian) from Papallacta to Napo, packing about a hundred pounds. These Indian packers are wonders. I just came across a note in "Quito to Bogota," by A. C. Veatch, which mentions them sending a message one hundred miles in a day by an Indian runner through rough country. There are other records of runs of 250 and 300 miles that are unbelievable by a white man. They have been bred for the purpose from ancient times. They work for little pay and will stick until the cows come home.

The first class fare from San Francisco to Guayaquil is about $140. Second class is much less, and with a hammock and a few dollars to the steward, is not bad. I prefer a freight boat, and if you could make connection with a captain who would sign you on as super-cargo or purser, and then accept about fifty dollars, it is much better. I never saw a captain of a tramp yet who wouldn't carry a man if approached right.

Firearms: .30-30 rifle or carbine; .38 or Colt standard; .22 single shot, or repeating, for a table gun.

Game: Puma, jaguar, bear, tapir, armadillo, anteater, opossum, capybara, deer (red and white), hare, rabbit, monkey, birds of many kinds, fish of many kinds (will not bite a hook, but are killed with berries by the Indians). In the lowlands on both eastern and western side there are many reptiles, but these disappear in the highlands. In the extreme highlands game is scarce.

Pack with Indians instead of burros. You can get burros or llamas (sulky brutes) in the high country. An Indian can travel ten times as fast and is less trouble.

I am giving you a line on a rainbow end that I would tackle if I had prospecting in my head just at present.

Write Pan-American Union, Washington, D. C., for the booklet, "Ecuador."

There are a number of American outfits working in Colombia up around Medellin and all of them are good for a job if a man blows in. It's no use to write them from this end, though. If you stopped in Colombia and looked these mines over it might give you an idea of the formations to be met with in Ecuador, but it's a hard trip to get back up to them in Colombia, due to lack of transportation.

You can get all provisions necessary in Quito, Rio Bamba, or other cities and towns. Gold pans, etc., should be taken from this end, for the wooden bowls the Indians use are unwieldy for a white man. I have used a large frying-pan in place of a pan.

Orange Growing in California

THE great exodus from city to farm seems to be under way. At least our "Ask Adventure" experts are deluged with letters asking how and where one can get a living from the soil and make a real home. If you are one of those who contemplate such a move, don't forget that oranges yield often $400 per acre. Mr. Harriman gives some sound advice about raising citrus fruits:

Question:—In the near future my parents and I intend moving to southern California. Therefore I should like any information you can give regarding this part of your State, especially the section lying near Los Angeles.

Is orange raising profitable? What books can I read on orange culture? Is orange land expensive?

How large are the ranches usually owned in southern California?

I understand there are agents who undertake the sale of one's oranges, and who also buy them on the trees. Is this true?

We would like to board in Los Angeles while looking over the ground. Can one rent a five-acre farm with the intention of buying later? And how much clear profit might be expected from a good crop on such a farm?

What is the fare from this city, and how long would travelling time be?"—FRANCIS J. ZOELLER, Brooklyn, N. Y.

Answer, by Mr. Harriman:—Yes, orange culture is very profitable to experts. I have no lists of books with me here, for I am 900 miles from home. Yes, the land is expensive. About all available land fit for citrus fruit has been set to trees now.

An orange ranch in full bearing brings from $2,000 to $3,500 an acre. Young trees on new land, with five years still to wait before bearing, bring from $1,200 to $1,500 an acre. Land with one-year-old trees brings from $750 to $1,000 an acre.

The orange orchards average around 15 to 25 acres each, though some are larger, even up to 100 acres.

The orange growers have associations that handle the entire crop in any particular section, but the growers do their own picking mostly.

The best thing you can do about a boarding place is to go to some hotel like the "Trenton" on Olive Street, and stop there while you hunt up the kind of place you like.

No owner of a citrus orchard would consider renting it to any man who was unused to citrus culture, because an inexperienced man would ruin it. As for the clear profit, that depends upon soil, the man in charge, the use of fertilizer, etc., but growers expect about $300 to $450 an acre profit.

See your Brooklyn railway agent about fare and time of travel. No use in writing clear across the continent to learn what is at your own door, nor is there any use in my bothering a local agent to hunt up information you should get there.

Be careful how you trust real estate agents.

Raising Ginseng

MANY herb experts are now successfully raising this valuable plant in the United States. But Korea seems to be the boss land for ginseng. As for cultivating it in the tropics, there are many conflicting opinions. Has any of you ever seen the plant grown in a hot climate?

Question:—"I am desirous of experimenting on my plantation with 'Ginseng,' and as I know nothing whatever about this root I will be very thankful for any information which you may be able to send regarding same.

We have good soil and a splendid rainfall, and the temperature varies from 83 to 96 degrees the year round, so you see we have no Winter or extreme heat."—CHAS. E. HAMILTON, Misima Island, Papua, Australasia.

Answer, by Mr. Ritchie:—As to trying the experiment of raising ginseng in the Papuan group, I can only give you the broadest first-hand information. But I am writing the U. S. Department of Agriculture at Washington, D. C., to ask if they have any bulletins on ginseng culture; if they send me any material on the subject I shall forward it at once to you.

As you know, doubtless, Korea leads in the production of ginseng, though a small amount comes from Manchuria, and in some of the Southern States of this country ginseng is raised with more or less success. The climate of Korea is temperate, with snows in Winter and rarely higher temperature than 90 degrees in Summer. The Korean root is collected after the first frost, when the sap of the plant has all gone to the root. It is prepared after an elaborate native formula of maceration in rice water and drying in a closed pot over a slow fire.

Offhand, I should say that the great difference in your climate over the Korean would prohibit the success of its growing with you. It is distinctly not a tropical plant; whether it can be grown successfully in a tropical climate I can not dare say. I hope that the Agriculture Department may have a bulletin which will give you much more specific information than I can.

Ancient Ruins of Central America

THAT a highly civilized race, the Mayas, existed in that region just south of Mexico, is a proven fact. Their cities and temples are fast being excavated. But even yet many remain undiscovered in the depths of dark Central American jungles. By railroad or boat one can be carried almost to the doors of these ancient ruins. And the great mysteries of this early race will no doubt soon be solved:

Question:—"I have read with much interest your notes on "Central America As It Is" in *Adventure* of eighteenth April issue, but I would like some direct information on British Honduras, Guatemala, etc., in regard to the ruins of the Maya period.

What is the best way to reach them and are the principal ruins far from the beaten path? From the little practical knowledge I have on the subject, I assume the United Fruit Co. steamers are best way of reaching British Honduras and Guatemala. But how near one can get to the best known ruins is what I wish to know, and any information you can give me on this subject will be gratefully received."—WENTWORTH G. FIELD.

Answer, by Mr. Young:—Quirigua ruins, where extensive excavations have been made, is within a mile of the railroad that crosses Guatemala. Copan which has been excavated, revealing a city of great magnitude, is about sixty miles from the Guatemalan Railway, which is about as good a way to get there as any other. I think the road leaves from Zacapa for this point.

Professor Marshall H. Saville, Department of Anthropology, Columbia University, has taken several scientific expeditions down to Central America. Another American who spent the greater part of several years making excavations in Copan is Mr. George Byron Gordon. He wrote some articles for *Century* on this subject, which were published about 1904 or 1905.

Less extensive operations have been carried on in the ruins of Tical, Quiche, Tehuacan, Ciudad Antigua, Sebaco, Matagalpa, Boaca Viejo, San Pedro de Lovago, Leon Viejo, Granada, Nandaimo, Diriomo, Pearl Lagoon, Ometepe Island and other islands of the Gran Lago, and the Chiriqui ruins of Panama and Costa Rica.

The ruins in Nicaragua are fairly easy of access, but the work done there has been slight. The interior of Honduras has only been scratched in this respect. I have not heard of any discoveries being made in British Honduras, the principal ones that have come to my notice being in Spanish Honduras. However, I have no doubt ruins of this kind exist in British Honduras, also.

The best way to reach Guatemala is via United Fruit boat to Puerto Barrios, and up by rail to the interior. Spanish Honduras is reached by mule from the end of a small railroad running inland from Puerto Cortez. It is about an eight-day trip to the capital. There is an auto bus running up to Tegucigalpa from Amapala, on the Pacific side. I believe better time can be made by crossing Guatemala by rail and then making the trip up from Amapala than by taking the mule trip from the Atlantic side.

LOST TRAILS

NOTE—We offer this department of the "Camp-Fire" free of charge to those of our readers who wish to get in touch again with old friends or acquaintances from whom the years have separated them. For the benefit of the friend you seek, *give your own name if possible.* All inquiries along this line, unless containing contrary instructions, will be considered as intended for publication in full with inquirer's name, in this department, at our discretion. We reserve the right, in case inquirer refuses his name, to substitute any numbers or other names, to reject any item that seems to us unsuitable, and to use our discretion in all matters pertaining to this department. Give also your own full address. We will, however, forward mail through this office, assuming no responsibility therefor. We have arranged with the Montreal *Star* to give additional publication in their "Missing Relative Column," weekly and daily editions, to any of our inquiries for persons last heard of in Canada. Except in case of relatives, inquiries from one sex to the other are barred.

SEAY, PHILIP, "Flip." Your father is dead. Let me hear from you at once.—MOTHER.

THOMAS, JOHN W. Left the P. O. Home, March, 1916. Brother is asking for him. He is now eighteen years of age.—Address H. M. T., care of *Adventure.*

BURKETT, Sergeant Major, First Cavalry. Any one knowing the address kindly write.—Address J. W. REDINGTON, Box 103, Kelseyville, Cal.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

RUBENSTIEN, HARRY, alias Harry Butler. Worked with Phil Shaw in lumber camp, November 11, 1918, to December 31, 1918. Lost track of you. Write, care of *Adventure*, L. T. No. 380.

HOWARD, R. L. Write and tell me where I can reach you. Have important news for you. All well.—Address HERMAN S. WILCHMAN, 723 Beach St., Pine Bluff, Ark.

MC FADDEN, PAUL. Last heard of in Buie, Ariz., 1917. Was then working in mines. Any information will be appreciated by his mother.—Address MRS. A. M. MCFADDEN, 327 S. Adams St., Fort Worth, Texas.

Inquiries will be printed three times, then taken out. In the first February issue all unfound names asked for during the past two years will be reprinted alphabetically.

REED, ELSIVINA, E., or GEO. C. Last heard of in Warren, R. I. Any one knowing their whereabouts kindly communicate with CALVIN C. REED, 12 Wyman St., W. Medford, Mass.

MARCHMONTE, MERLE. Served in 13th U. S. Cavalry, F Troop, about 1913-1914. Please send information regarding his whereabouts.—Address E. W. GRAPATIN, Geneva, Ohio, R. D. 2, who will forward same to me. BENJAMIN SNOW.

WILKINS, NORMAN GLENN. Left Port Angeles, Wash., to go to Seattle on July 15, 1918, and was never heard from again. Six feet one inch tall, weight 150 pounds, dark hair and eyes, age twenty-seven. Any information in regard to this man will be appreciated by his mother.—Address MRS. E. E. FOY, 819 Cherry St., Port Angeles, Wash.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

ATKINS, WALTER J. Age, twenty-eight, six feet tall, weight about one hundred and forty pounds, black curly hair. Last seen in Moorhead, N. D., 1915. Any information will be appreciated.—Address HANS MALKMUS, 592 Superior St., Kenosha, Wis.

EDWARDS, GILBERT B. Age thirty-six, weight 200-220 pounds, height five feet nine inches, black hair tinged with gray, blue eyes, and teeth not very good. Worked as railroad machinist, fireman, engineer, etc. Heard of in Dallas, Texas, and Paula, Kansas, in 1916, and later at Nashville, Tenn., November, 1918. Mother is very sick and wants him home. Any one knowing his whereabouts please call his attention to this or write to his brother.—Address CHARLES W. EDWARDS, 910 Garden St., Hoboken, N. J.

BUNKER, EARL R. Last heard of at Fort Riley, Kansas. Any information concerning him will be appreciated. "Happy," your old pal "Red," from Schofield Barracks, would like to hear from you. Write care of *Adventure*, L. T. No. 381.

Inquiries will be printed three times, then taken out. In the first February issue all unfound names asked for during the past two years will be reprinted alphabetically.

SANTRY, DENIS. At one time, staff cartoonist of a well known Johannesburg, South Africa, daily newspaper. Last known in Penang, Straits Settlements. Write your best chum, old chap. What's happened? Have you "gone native"?—Address, care of *Adventure*, L. T. No. 379.

HAYES, ARTHUR JOSEPH. Please write to your closest buddy in the C. E. F. I have located Folk. We misunderstood him. A reconciliation of the "Three Terrible Yanks" is in order and will occur as soon as I locate you.—Address MIKE O'LEARY, care of Y. M. C. A., Lima, Ohio.

CONKLE, CLARENCE. Formerly of Grand Rapids and Battle Creek, Mich. Left Grand Rapids about six years ago. Is a buffer by trade. I have news of great importance for him. Any information will be appreciated.—Address X. W. WORDENBURG, Kalamazoo, Mich., General Delivery.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

WOOTEN, GEORGE. Was sergeant in Captain Bendire's Troop K, First U. S. Cavalry, and captured Captain Jack, Chief of the Modocs. Last saw him in the Yellowstone during the Nez Perce War in 1877. Heard that he had gone to Salt Lake.—Address J. W. REDINGTON, Box 103, Kelseyville, Cal.

BEAUBIER, JERRY E. Brother. Age eighteen, height five feet eight inches, weight 140 pounds, blue eyes, fair hair, skin slightly freckled and tanned. Left Brandon in company of Russell Maxwell in June, 1919. Want to hear from you.—Address DAVID H. BEAUBIER, 436 Twelfth St., Brandon, Manitoba, Canada.

CUTHBERT, CLARENCE, Federico Mondragon. Native of San Francisco. Six feet in height, hair and mustache slightly gray. Has relatives or friends in Frisco. Is a soldier of fortune. Last heard of with Pancho Villa in Mexico. Thought to have gone to Russia. Has quick temper and is noted for being a crack shot. I would like to hear from him or anybody who knows his whereabouts.—Address ROBERTO MENDEZ, care of *Adventure*, L. T. No. 382.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

SHELDON, WILLIS D. Sixty-five years old, six feet one inch tall, weight 185 pounds, snow-white hair, bald spot on top of head, no teeth on the upper jaw, heavy voice, slightly stoop-shouldered, member of the Masons and Odd Fellows of Canaan, Conn. Left Bridgeport December 12, 1916, and has not been heard from since; used to drive a laundry wagon in Pittsfield, Mass. Information with regard to the whereabouts of this man should be sent to Mr. WILLIAM E. BURTON, Washington and Madison Aves., Bridgeport, Conn.

DRUMM-JONES, Charles J. Last heard of as solicitor for magazines and portrait houses. Five feet ten inches in height, weighs about 155 pounds, dark complexion, wears glasses and has a gold tooth. Was forty-one years old August 2nd. Any one knowing his whereabouts please write his mother.—Address MRS. MARY J. JONES, General Delivery, Fort Worth, Texas.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

GEHO, PVT. DAVID W., 97th Co., Sixth Regiment, U. S. Marines. Received training at Paris Island, S. C. Went overseas in Fall of 1918. Last heard from October 6, 1918, from Denver, W. Va. Short and heavily built, light hair, gray eyes, about nineteen years old. Reported killed in action Nov. 5, 1918, but no official confirmation has been received. Any information will be appreciated.—Address RAYMOND HARLAN, 308 Morton Ave., Moundsville, W. Va.

THE following have been inquired for in full in either the First November or Mid-November issues of Adventure. They can get the name of the inquirer from this magazine:

BECK, MRS. BESSIE; Conners, Will F. W., Crossey, William; DeLapp, Will E.; Gibbs, Richard H.; Glauman, Al; Hewke, Manda; Holder, Charles Henry; Kade, Ray T.; Knox, Mrs. R., and Bill; Kuller, Harry; Meyer, Lidia and Gotlieb; Moran, Thomas or Michael; Nance, I. V.; Rohrich, Arthur; Rubenstein, Meyer; Smith, "Bantam Red"; South Africans; Texas "Slim"; Track, Sam; Turner, George; Vertais, Marino.

MANUSCRIPTS UNCLAIMED

HASTLAR GAL BREATH; Ruth Gilfillan; Jack P. Robinson; Roy Ozmer; Miss Jimmie Banks; O. B. Franklin; Lieutenant Wm. S. Hilles; G. H. Bennett; Bryon Chrisholm; A. B. Paradis; E. E. S. Atkins; James P. Goggins; G. E. Hungerford.

UNCLAIMED mail is held by Adventure for the following persons, who may obtain it by sending us present address and proof of identity.

ALLISON, CORP. JAMES T.; Babcock, Lucius A.; Beaton, G. M.; Benson, Edwin Worth; Bryson, Clarence F.; Mr. Brownell; Carpenter, Capt. Robert S.; Carr, Fred; Casey, H E.; Coles, Bobby; Cook, William N.; Cosby, Arthur F.; Engleby, B.; Garson, Ed.; Hale, Robert E.; Harris, Walter J.; Hart, Jack; Hines, Joseph; Kelly, Charles Lester; Kuckaby, William Francis; Kuhn, Edward; Kutcher, Harry; Lafler, Mrs. Harry; Lancaster, C. E.; Larisey, Jack; Lee, Dr. C.; Lee, Capt. Harry; Lee, Dr. William R.; Leighton, Capt.; "Lonely Jock"; Lovett, Harold S.; McAdams, W. B.; MacDonald, Tony; MacNamee, Alva I.; Madsen, Sgt. E. E.; Nichols, Leon; Hunt, Daniel O'Connell; Parrott, D. C.; Reid, Raymond D.; Rich, Bob; Rodgers, Stewart; Rundle, Merrill G.; Scott, James F.; Shepard, H. O.: Swan, George F.; Taylor, Jim; Tripp, Edward; Van Tyler, Chester; Von Gelucke, Byron: Wetherell, Corp. D. E.; Williams, Raymond J.; Williams, W. P.; Wood, Basil D.; S 177284: 439: L. T. 348; J. C. H.: W. S.-X. V.

PLEASE send us your present address. Letters forwarded to you at address given us do not reach you.—Address E. F. BRACE, care *Adventure.*

THE TRAIL AHEAD

MID-DECEMBER ISSUE

Nine stories, each of them pulsing with life and action, come to you with our next number. Other features are listed on page two.

THE REDEMPTION OF BILL HOLLAND

By G. A. Wells

With the horror of a railroad disaster stabbing his conscience, *Bill Holland* sinks to the depths, then tries to "come back." But he finds every hand against him. Still he has fight left in his character.

THE WIZARDRY OF FEAR

By Robert J. Pearsall

Inside the remote Chinese village, whence no man has returned, *Partridge* and *Hazard*, two young Americans, discover a plot for world domination which involves a weapon heretofore unknown.

IKE HARPER'S HISTORICAL HOLIDAY

By W. C. Tuttle

If you are in any doubt as to who or what was the reason for the Fourth of July being a holiday, this story will not settle your mind.

A DEAD MAN'S TALE

By Gordon Young

Twenty years before, *Dekker* had brained the man with a war-club. But now for six months he had been receiving notes from the dead man in the queer scrawl that *Dekker* knew only too well.

THE SUPREME COURT GOES FISHIN'

By Stephen Chalmers

This fishing trip forces a representative of the Supreme Court to resort to his law books and two quarts of whisky in order to keep out of jail.

THE LAST JOKE OF JOKER JOE

By Hapsburg Liebe

This Tennessee mountaineer is very prone to practical joking, but there comes a day when he looks upon such diversion with horror.

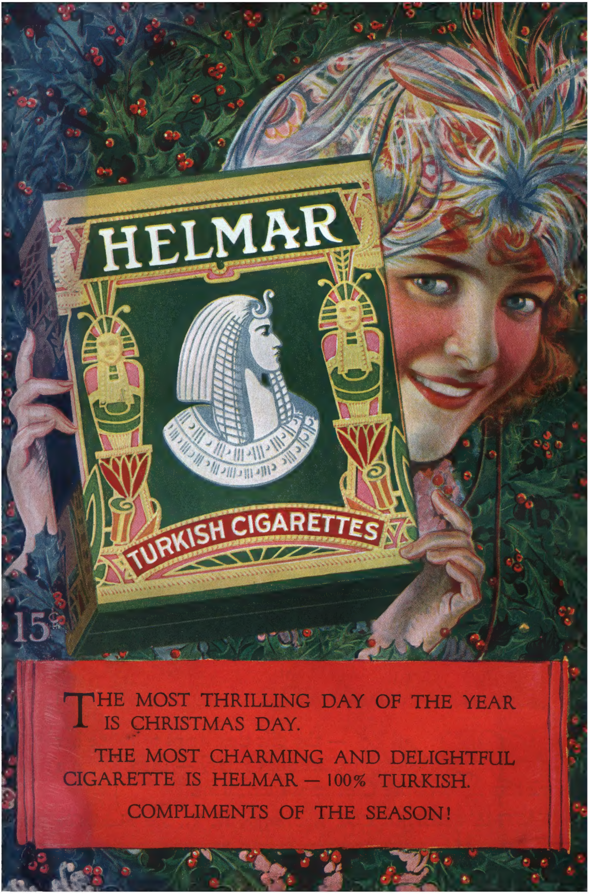
GENTLEMEN OF THE NORTH Conclusion

By Hugh Pendexter

In which *Franklin* buys a woman from the Indians, and two great fur companies end their last struggle for supremacy in the land of the Chippewas.

KODAK — the gift that helps to make her Christmas merry — then keeps a picture story of the Christmas merriment.

EASTMAN KODAK CO., ROCHESTER, N. Y., *The Kodak City*



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